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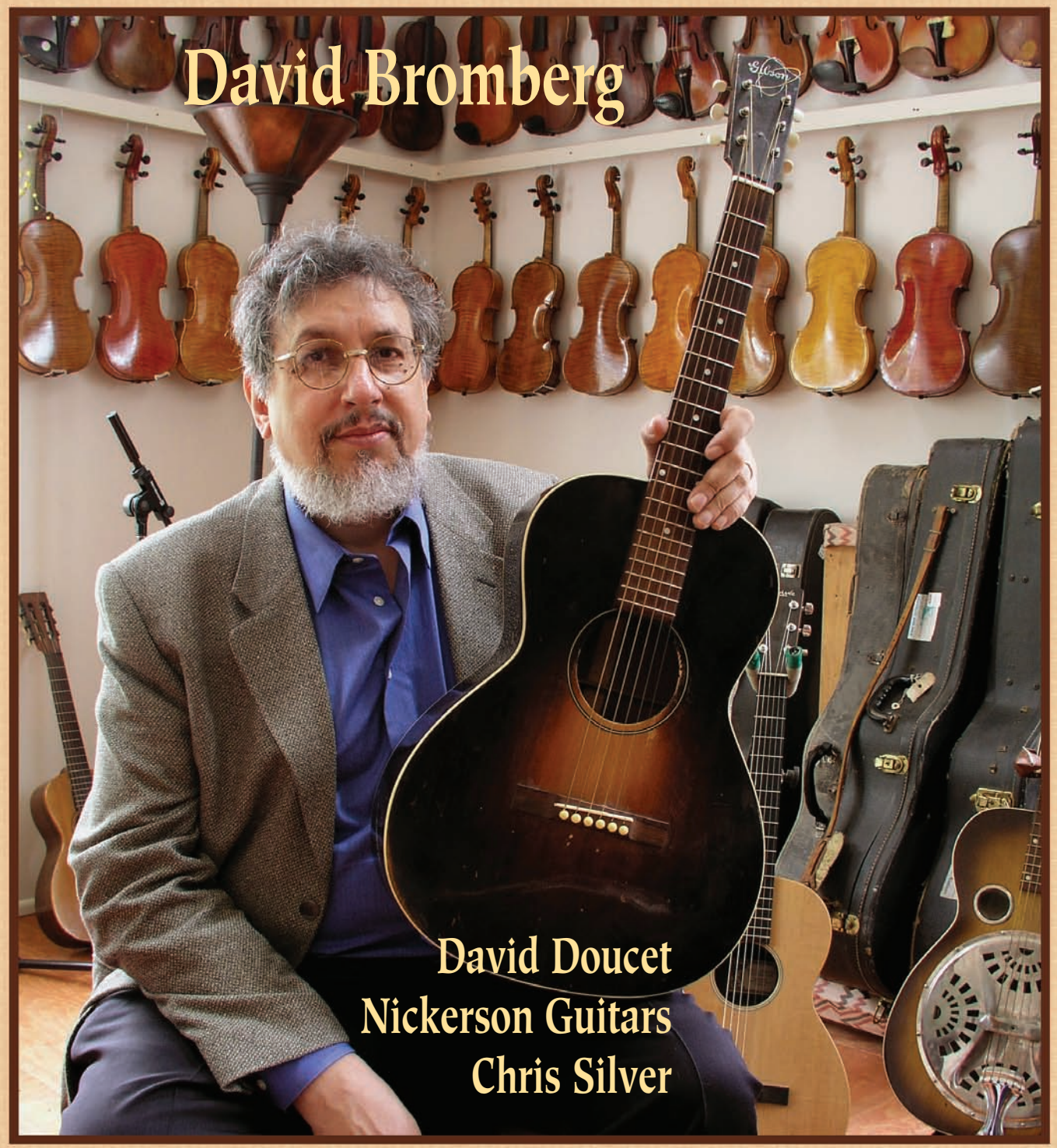
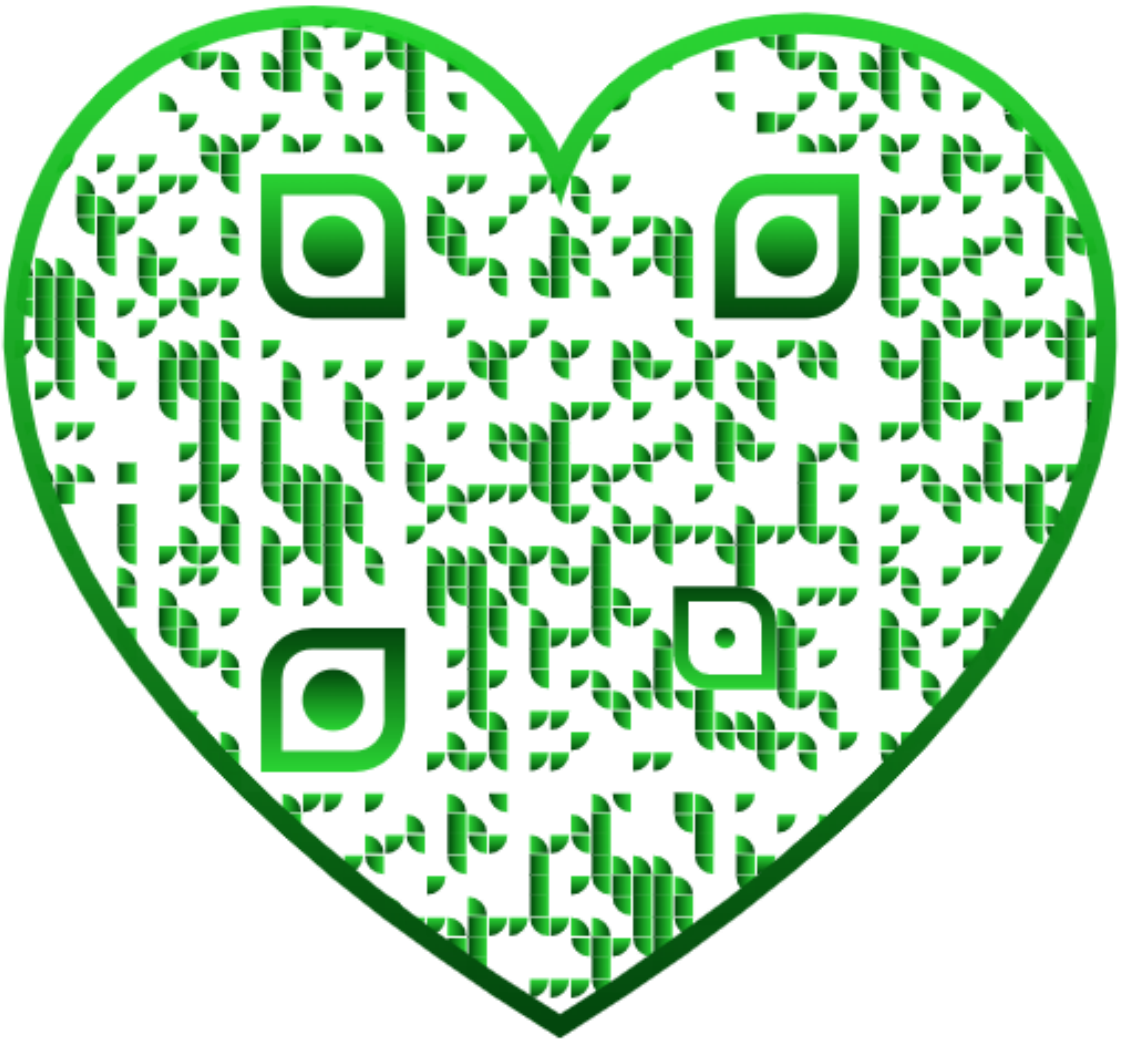
Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Volume 7, Number 5 July/August 2003





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How to Duplicate & Promote an Acoustic CD Release

1. **Send your music to radio.** No matter how you define your goals, you need to get your music to folk radio. One excellent way to do this is through a **radio-oriented sampler CD program**, such as the OASISACOUSTIC™ sampler CDs, which get the music of Oasis clients to hundreds of key radio stations throughout the U.S.

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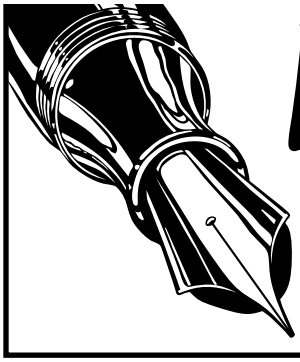


EDITOR'S PAGE

What's New?

In addition to working to put together this issue featuring David Bromberg, we have been busy with a number of new projects here at *Flatpicking Guitar* and I wanted to give you an update so you know what to expect in the near future:

Videos to DVD: We are continuing with the process of converting all of our instructional videos to the DVD format. The newest conversion was *Orrin Star's Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar Workshop*, which is now available on DVD. We can only afford to convert about one video to DVD every other month. Next in line are Brad Davis' *Flatpick Jam Volumes I & II* and then Wyatt Rice's *Advance Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar*. We should have all of our videos available in the DVD format by this winter.

New Concert DVD: On the 22nd of May we filmed a live concert performance by Jim Hurst, Tim Stafford, and Bryan Sutton. Each artist performed some tunes solo, each performed in duo with one of the others and all three performed together in trio. Most of the tunes were instrumentals, however, four vocal tunes were included, one sung by special guest Ronnie Bowman. We are hoping to have this DVD edited and ready for sale by September.

New CD Projects: In addition to completing the recording process on our new various artist compilation *Flatpicking Favorites: Hot and Spicy*, we have also added Jon Randall's *Willin'* CD to our list at FGM Records (check out www.fgmrecords.com). We are also talking with several artist about the possibility of having their next projects on our label. I don't want to spill the beans until contracts are signed, however, I will let you know that we have some exciting new releases planned for this winter.

Brad Davis Tour: In addition to being busy with The Sam Bush Band, Brad Davis is continually touring to promote his solo release *I'm Not Gonna Let The Blues Bring Me Down*. He has been doing one-hour free concerts in record stores across the country, conducting in-store workshops at a number of music stores, visiting radio stations, and performing concerts at numerous venues. If you would like to know if Brad will be coming to your town, check his tour schedule on the www.fgmrecords.com website. Brad has a great show and conducts a very informative workshop. Check it out!

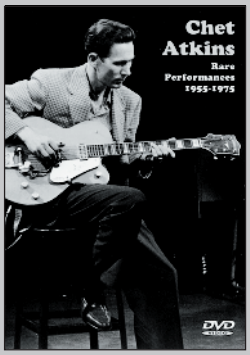
Where Did They Go?

Due to the restriction on the number of pages we can print in the magazine and the amount of available time on the audio program, we cannot include every columnist in every issue. Most of the time it works out that some columnists are busy on the road and have to skip and issue here and there. Additionally, some columnists submit text only columns and do not appear on the audio CD. For the first time I had every columnist submit an article for this issue and every one of them had an audio submission as well. We can only fit about 70 minutes of audio on the CD. After we laid all the columnist's audio submissions in for this issue the audio program was 86 minutes long. We had to do some trimming. Thus Brad Davis' and Dix Bruce's columns were cut from this issue, but they will be back next time. Sorry about that!

Corrections

A few issues ago we featured Mike Scapp, but forgot to mention his website address: http://mikescap.netfirms.com/

In Volume 7, Number 2 (January/February 2003) we printed a transcription of the tune "Spider Bit the Baby" in Steve Kaufman's column, but failed to provide the publishing information. The following information should have been included: "Spider Bit The Baby" written by Kenny Baker, Copyright 1983, Wynwood Music Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.



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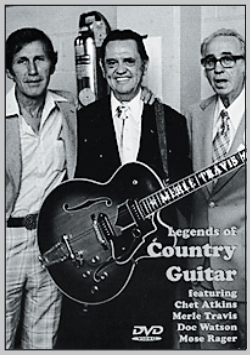

Legends of Country Guitar
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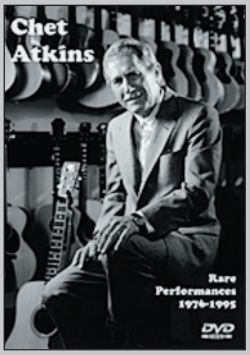

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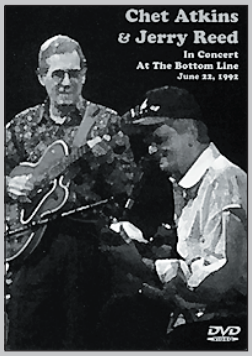

Chet Atkins & Jerry Reed
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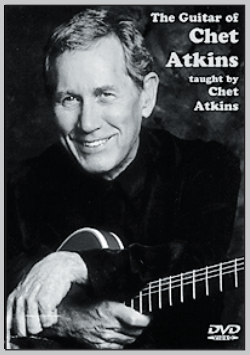

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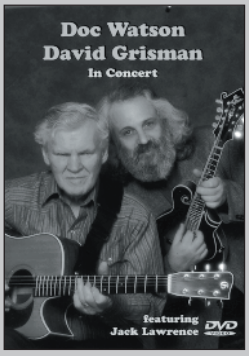

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Doc's Guitar Jam
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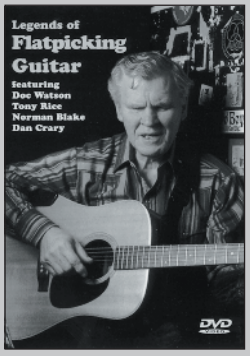

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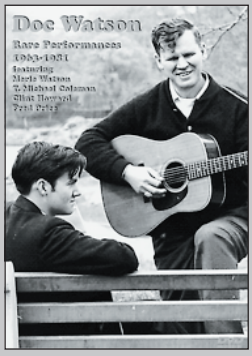

Doc Watson
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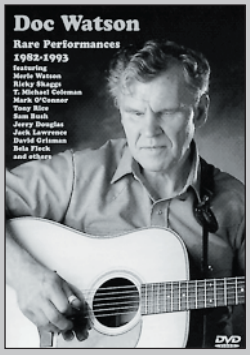

Doc Watson
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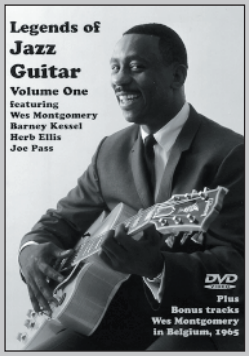

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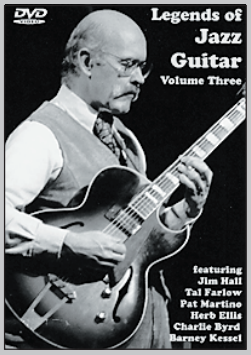

Legends of Jazz Guitar #3
Hall/Farlow/Martino...
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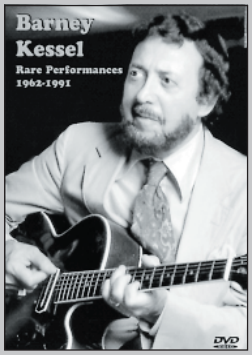

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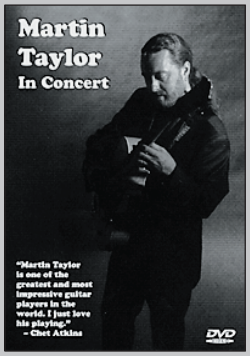

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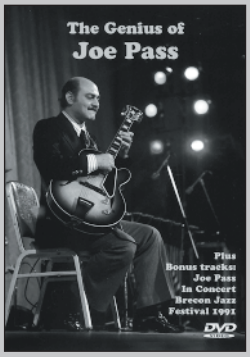

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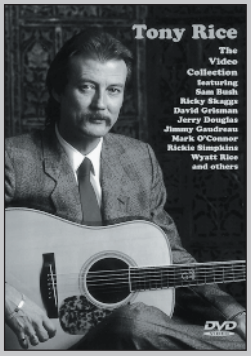

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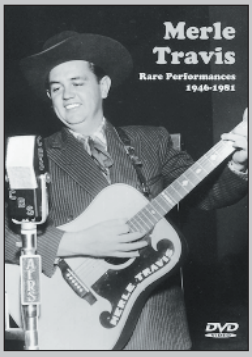

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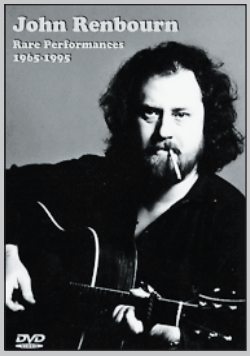

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David Bromberg

by Orrin Star

Introduction

"You're ugly!!" someone in the audience shouted at David Bromberg years ago. "With what I got I don't need good looks!" Bromberg replied. Beyond a snappy retort, that exchange captures something essential about this unique guitarist and performer who still fills concert halls despite having "quit the road" nearly twenty years ago.

Bromberg has always been a kind of tall, gangly, bearded Jewish gargoyle (an early album featured him in giant perspective straddling the Empire State building a la King Kong) so he wouldn't have argued with that heckler about his looks. But it's also true that rare performers like Bromberg—performers who can draw you into their worlds so wholeheartedly that your marrow sometimes vibrates—not only transcend looks but become beautiful.

Bromberg figured large in my own musical development. My "aha" flatpicking moment happened at a folk festival in northern New Jersey in 1969 where Bromberg was leading an afternoon guitar workshop. Spotting Lew London (the best area flatpicker at the time) in the crowd, Bromberg invited him up to play some fiddle tunes. Watching them flatpick blew my mind and altered my musical direction. Seeing Bromberg perform on many different occasions over the years, I came to realize that his way of being on stage and of crafting a show spoke to me as much as his actual playing; there was a magic there that I still try and emulate.

In particular, I recall a 1985 concert in Cambridge, MA, where the David Bromberg Quartet followed the Tony Rice Unit. Tony could still sing at that point, and did a musically amazing set—but the crowd was two feet off the ground by the time Bromberg left the stage.

Though Bromberg has focused much less on performing in recent years, he did make his mark on the various musical forms he tangled with, and his influence is worth exploring. Not long ago on the Flatpick-L internet newsgroup someone posted the question "What's your favorite guitar solo of all time?" Among the dozens of replies: David Bromberg's solo on "Mr Bojangles."

We got together in late January at Bromberg's new home in Wilmington, Delaware. Though we knew each other casually (I had opened shows for him on several occasions) we had never really spoken at any length before. I was not disappointed: he's an interesting, open, complex, articulate character. So I'm glad to be able to share with you this profile of one of my musical heroes.

—Orrin Star

David Bromberg occupies a special place in the hearts of many guitar fans. From his beginnings as a sideman in New York City in the 1960s, accompanying artists ranging from Bob Dylan to Chubby Checker to Jerry Jeff Walker, to his emergence as a solo performer and then leader of a full-time touring big band in the 70s, he seemed to do it all: fingerstyle Delta blues, ragtime, flatpicking, electric blues and slide, early jazz, rock and roll. He was a true Americana artist before that term was coined. And above all, he had a way of getting inside whatever he was doing that made it personal and powerful.

In 1980, Bromberg "retired." He disbanded his group and moved to Chicago from California to attend violin-making school (having decided that he needed to "rejoin the human race" and having taken an interest in violins at a California violin shop where he would hang out when he wasn't on the road). Although he never stopped performing, Bromberg's main focus for the past couple decades has been violins and family life.

Though never a mainstream flatpicker (as he'll be the first to tell you, his playing was never particularly even), Bromberg nonetheless played an important role in popularizing the style:

- He was one of the few touring solo artists flatpicking in the late 1960s.
- His flatpicked leads graced early recordings by important bluegrass artists like Mike Auldridge and Vassar Clements.
- His debut Columbia album (*David Bromberg*, 1971) included a duet with Norman Blake on "Arkansas Traveler"—perhaps the first time a flatpicking duet was featured on a major label release. (Bromberg also acted as producer on John Hartford's landmark *Aereoplane* album, which also featured Blake.)
- Dramatic fiddle tune medleys—with him on guitar–were always big parts of his band shows
- His band showcased fellow stringed multi-instrumentalist Dick Fegy, who would sometimes get to demonstrate his considerable flatpicking skills as well. (Both Fegy and Bromberg were included on the Kicking Mule anthology LP *Flatpicking Guitar Festival*.)

To many of us who came of acoustical musical age in the 1960s and 70s, before there was "Doc" or "Norman" or "Tony" there was "Bromberg."

David Bromberg was born in Philadelphia and grew up in Tarrytown, New York, twenty miles north of New York City. Though originally drawn to flute (and briefly piano), he settled on guitar at around age 13, teaching himself the basics from Mel Bay books using his brother's classical guitar. Soon he carried his guitar with him everywhere ("I was really obnoxious") and playing "whatever was popular."

He credits a very small music theory class in high school as being a fortuitously helpful part of his musical development and recalls that hearing Sleepy John Estes' recording of "Working Man's Blues" was both his introduction to Delta blues and the basis of an important guitar epiphany: one day—having heard the song dozens and dozens of times—the way to play the introduction simply "came" to him while he was waiting for a train; he just knew how it was played even though he wouldn't be with his guitar again for several hours.

Starting to play in various bands and venturing more and more into the City, his musical life shifted into high gear when he moved to Manhattan in 1964 to attend Columbia University. The folk boom in Greenwich Village was hitting its stride and Bromberg became a fixture at the Gaslight coffeehouse there.

One gig whose importance he only realized in retrospect was as a guitarist with the Phoenix Singers ("three black men who sang Tom Paxton songs in shirts open to the navel accompanied by a couple of Jewish guitar players"). Playing rhythm guitar for them proved to be a real eye-opener: "for a long time I was trying to acquire technique and I had no concept of time."

During this period Bromberg was first exposed to bluegrass and flatpicking by meeting Jody Stecher ("what a great musician. Jody was a huge influence on me") and also hearing Don Reno at the Gaslight. There was also an area bluegrass band with a guitarist named Hank Miller (and a mandolinist named Grisman) whose playing really impressed him. And soon after, Doc started coming north to perform at the Gaslight as well.

During his two college years Bromberg also started studying with—and then becoming "lead boy" for—the Reverend Gary Davis, whose thumb-and-index fingerpicking style he is still conversant with.

Bromberg was something of a musical sponge and chameleon rolled into one: "I learned a lot from everybody. I wanted to be able to play everything. And the way I got away with it was when I would hang out with flatpickers they thought I was the jazz player, and when I would hang out with jazz players they thought I was the ragtime player, when I hung out with ragtime players they thought I was the flatpicker. So I acquired whatever I could."

It was this eclecticism—combined with a growing sensitivity and musicality—that helped Bromberg make his initial musical mark as a sideman, a role that he excelled at and still considers his forte. His guitar work would eventually grace well over a hundred albums. And—having played with him on a few occasions—I can tell you that

David Bromberg accompanying Doug Kershaw

Bromberg at the Philly Folk Festival early 70's (accompanied by three artists used to having him as a sideman: John Harford, John Sebastian and Tom Paxton). Bromberg is playing his trademark Martin (a converted archtop whose svelte depth later inspired Martin's M series).

when he's backing you up you really feel supported. He brings a rare focus and energy to the task.

Seeing his popularity as a sideman grow to the point where he could regularly afford cabs home after gigs instead of the subway ("I thought 'this is it'") Bromberg left college after two years to pursue music full-time.

One of Bromberg's most notable sideman gigs was accompanying Jerry Jeff Walker. Walker was based in Manhattan at the time and performing in a group that didn't like doing his country songs. Bromberg loved those songs and sought out opportunities to play with him. They eventually toured and recorded together. Walker's masterpiece "Mr Bojangles" not only featured Bromberg's playing on the original recording but also proved to be a seminal song in Bromberg's own repertoire in the years to come.

The transition from sideman to solo artist occurred gradually. A milestone of sorts was the last Isle of Wight festival in 1970. Bromberg was there to accompany Rosalie Sorrels. The crowd had turned ugly, and was giving her (and other more subtle folk artists) a very hard time. In the middle of her set Rosalle asked David to do one of his songs—and the crowd loved it. The promoters then asked if he would come back later and play again. He said "sure." Returning later as requested Bromberg asked how many tunes they wanted him to do (thinking they'd say three or four). "Can you do an hour?" they asked. Though he hadn't performed solo very much at all prior to that, he completely won the crowd over and received three encores. And though this happened on the first night of the festival (before the major media had arrived) word of Bromberg's prowess at the festival did get back to New York and helped land him his recording deal with Columbia Records the following year.

Bromberg's early outings under his own name were either solo or in small ensembles (which would sometimes include Kenny Kosek on fiddle and Andy Statman on mandolin). He considers this time the "peak" of his guitar playing: "when I was about 23 it just came through me and I was extremely musical." One interesting index of this was Bromberg's discovery that, following his guitar solos, he had difficulty "recovering the English language." Having completely immersed his head in sound and music he was sometimes at a loss for lyrics when it was time to sing again. He found that he had to pre-plan the way certain solos would end in order to give his head the time to shift gears.

With the release of his debut album on Columbia in 1971 Bromberg's career went into high gear. He toured extensively and recorded prolifically, making a total of nine albums during the decade (four for Columbia and then five for Fantasy). By 1973 the David Bromberg Band was a roadhouse power, a crack 7-man unit that gave breadth and depth to Bromberg's eclectic musical vision. At one point, Bromberg recalls, he was on the road for a period of two years without being home for more than two weeks. "It wasn't like 'I'm going on a tour'—it was: we were on tour; that's what we did."

But beyond this musical history is the fact that Bromberg is a truly mesmerizing live performer. He commands the stage and takes you on a stylistic journey, playing passionate guitar all the way and topping it all off with riveting mid-song raps and deft humor. Imagine the soul of BB King, the grit of Blind Boy Fuller, the flatpicking of Doc, the exuberance of Chuck Berry, and the irony of Arlo—all in one.

Without a doubt blues is the strongest pillar of the House of David. Whether doing a solo acoustic "Delia" or a big band electric "Sweet Home Chicago," he is exquisitely possessed. And I've always loved the sound of electric blues licks played on an acoustic guitar (something which you don't hear all that often and at which Bromberg—as does Doc—excels).

Typically, the emotional highpoint of a Bromberg show is one of his recitations–"pre-rap" rants at the end of one of his own slow blues in which he explodes in scorn against a lover who done him wrong. ("Before I'll be your fool I will be so long gone, dead and forgot that I will see everyone you ever KNEW—LOVED—TOUCHED—STOOD NEXT TO—HEARD OF—SMELT—FELT—DREAMED ABOUT—THOUGHT OF—OR IMAGINED—IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFETIME AND EXISTENCE-

—ROASTED IN HELL FOR A HUNDRED MILLION, MILLION, QUADRILLION YEARS...!!")

Asked about his blues persona, Bromberg reveals that he spent "more time in church than any Jewish guy you know. I love preaching. And if I wasn't Jewish I would have become a preacher. And I like to preach on the guitar—I like to phrase like a preacher speaking."

Bromberg's wife Nancy Josephson (a successful sculptor who years ago played bass and sang with the Buffalo Gals, one of the first full-time female bluegrass bands in the country, and also with Peter Rowan) observed to me that this preacher-like, in-the-moment quality of David's soloing contributes to his appeal; you sense that he doesn't really know where he's going next either and so you find yourself rooting for him to end up on his feet.

Creating in-the-moment extends to his whole way of being on stage. "My theory or feeling on it is—and this has helped me through the most difficult audience situations I've ever been in—you have to throw yourself completely into the most intense things you can and just be there. And if you're able to throw yourself into them completely, 90 percent plus of the time you're going to bring the audience along with you."

Being there completely. What a concept!? That's something preachers know a thing or two about. And something that Bromberg has always done better than most.

"One thing that I'm very proud about my band is that we all always listened to each other play. That was true interaction. And the audience could see that. I would never stare out into space or ignore somebody who was doing a solo. I would listen—and people would know I was listening—and I thought that was important to do."

"I believe I have super powers when I'm on the stage. I mean it's completely crazy. You know I used to walk on tables in nightclubs. I couldn't be hurt, because I was on the stage. I was never ever in my whole career—which was pretty damn long—topped by a heckler."

Bromberg's decision to leave the road and attend violin-making school was the result of both an identity crisis (he felt adrift and isolated living in California) and a realization that he had prevailed over insecurity: "It took me a long time to decide that I did what I did adequately. And right around the time that I decided that, that was a kind of a trigger for me not needing to do it anymore."

David Bromberg and Norman Blake at the Ark in Ann Arbor, MI

While completing his four-year violin training, Bromberg realized that he was more interested in collecting, appraising and dealing in violins than in building them. In particular, he developed an interest in American-made instruments. His collection of 250 American violins represents the largest group of noteworthy instruments from a single country ever assembled by a single individual. And Bromberg is today regarded as the world's leading authority on American violins.

Last August David and his family moved to Wilmington, Delaware. Encouraged by city leaders aware of his renown and interested in reviving the city center, David and his family acquired and renovated a multi-story building downtown. Since October "David Bromberg and Associates Fine Violins" (his first retail venture) has been open for business on the ground level.

Nowadays Bromberg enjoys his occasional weekend gigs ("they're like pickup softball games—let's get out the bats and gloves and have some fun with our buddies"). He also likes to appear with Jay Ungar and Molly Mason (in part because they allow him to be a sideman again). With his kids almost grown—and his recent series of spring performances on the east coast having gone very well—we can expect to see more of Bromberg on stage in the coming years.

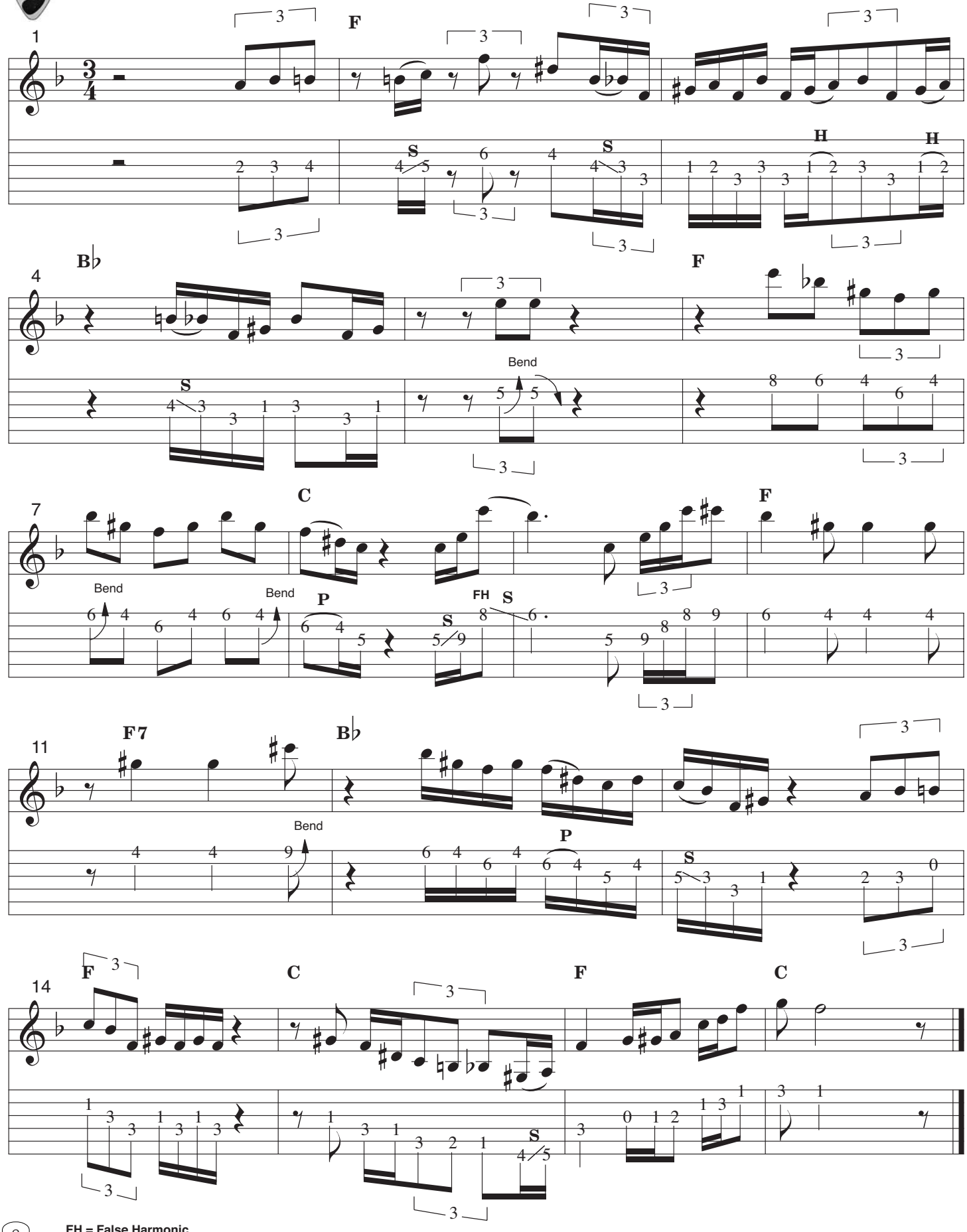
"Most of the good bluegrass players—and this is very worthy—place the emphasis on being as perfect as possible. And the one thing I've never been is perfect. I'm a hugely imperfect singer, and just about as imperfect a guitar player. But that's not the point. Which is one of the reasons I like Italian violins. You know the great Italians violins? They're just not symmetrical; that was not the point."

Go see Bromberg perform and you're not gonna learn any new flatpicking licks. It may even take you a while to get a handle on the big, tall, rabbi-like figure with the guitar. But you can almost always count on something special going down. And you might very well learn something about being there.

On this issue's audio companion we have provided a cut from a live show that David Bromberg gave in Cambridge, MA, in 1985. It is the country song "Almost Persuaded." Brad Davis transcribed Bromberg's solo and we have provided that transcription on the following page.

Audio CD
Track 5

Almost Persuaded

Arranged by David Bromberg
Transcribed by Brad Davis

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Staten Island Hornpipe

by Craig Vance

Here's a tune you don't hear much anymore these days that deserves a little dusting off.

I first heard "Staten Island Hornpipe" back in the early 70s from a mixed tape of Fennig's All Stars, featuring Bill Spence on the hammered dulcimer. Then in the late 70s I heard it done by Bob Black on his recording *Ladies On the Steamboat* (Ridgerunner 018). Norman takes a pretty impressive guitar break on this one. As you may recall, I did another selection from that very recording, "Little Black Mustache" (Jan/Feb 2000 FGM, Volume4/No2).

The second half of the tune goes to the VII chord with a punctual statement following a descending D run. There are some strategically placed hammer-ons and pull-offs which maximize the boldness of the second half. You can also use dynamics to their fullest potential in that part of the tune. When you come to the C chord in that section, push the pick a bit harder and you will see what I mean.

This is another great tune to pull out of the files for any jam session. Both of the versions that I have heard were played at a fairly slow pace. This would be a good tune to start a medley, following it with a quicker tempo number.

At any rate, "Staten Island Hornpipe" is a fun tune to play and has not been played to death.

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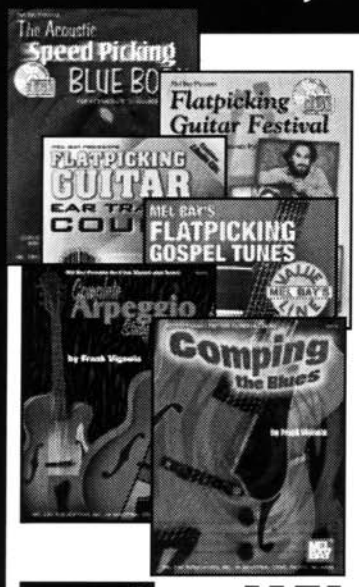

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Audio CD
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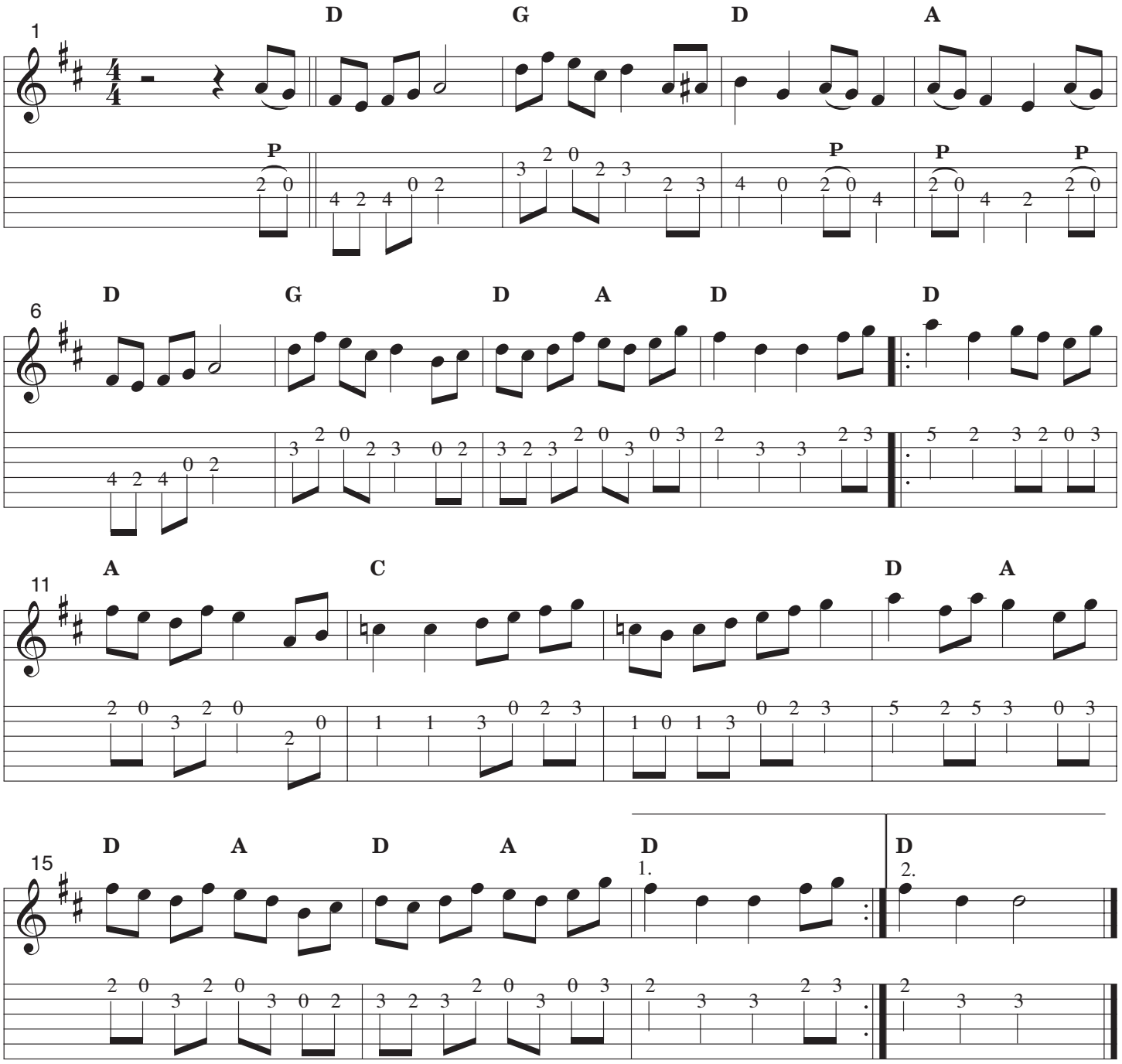
Staten Island Hornpipe

Arranged by Craig Vance

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Beginner's Page

by Dan Huckabee

Up the Neck for Beginners?

If you've only been playing guitar for a short time, you may feel intimidated by the thought of playing hot leads up the neck, so I thought we'd just start a series of articles to address this seemingly "advanced" area of your guitar.

First of all, you could play bluegrass guitar for a lifetime and never go higher than the first four frets. In fact I might go so far as to say that if it's past the first few frets, **it ain't grass!**. I'm not intending to sound narrow-minded because bluegrass guitar does get its characteristic power and personality from the first few frets (and don't forget that there's also the use of the capo to get you up higher). But there are as many reasons to learn to play "up-the-neck" as there are reasons not to.

Learning to play up the neck is definitely going to help your pinky finger, it's going to help you understand the guitar, and it's going to offer you some additional variety and coloration. And hey, the frets get closer together the farther up you go!

I'm going to define "up-the-neck" as playing in a closed position where you're not mixing in any open strings with your fretted notes in order to construct your solo. Again, bluegrass guitar is usually open chords and open solos, but rules are made to be broken.

To get our feet wet, we'll start by transposing the well-known fiddle tune "Red Haired Boy" into a closed position arrangement. If you've followed my previous columns, you may have learned this tune in the standard "open" position. (The closed version is identical to the open version but played up the neck with no open strings) Your first finger will play all notes that occur on the 8th and 9th frets. Your second finger will play all notes that occur on the 10th fret. Your third finger will not be used. Your fourth finger will play all notes that occur on the 12th fret.

Take careful note that there are five occurrences of a "roll." If this is a new technique for you, don't panic! Rolling is used whenever you change strings but don't change frets. In other words, when you go from 9th fret fourth string to 9th fret third string, you roll your first finger from string to string to make the transition smooth. If this sounds confusing in print, it will become obvious when you try it on your guitar.

An important thing to realize is that the guitar is tuned in fourths. This is not as convenient for soloing as it is on the mandolin or fiddle (which is tuned in fifths). This means that guitar players are faced with trickier position changing situations, to create a playable solo.

"Red Haired Boy" appears on our DVD course *Bluegrass Guitar The Right Way is the Easy Way*, so give us a call toll free at 800-543-6125 if you have any questions.

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Red Haired Boy

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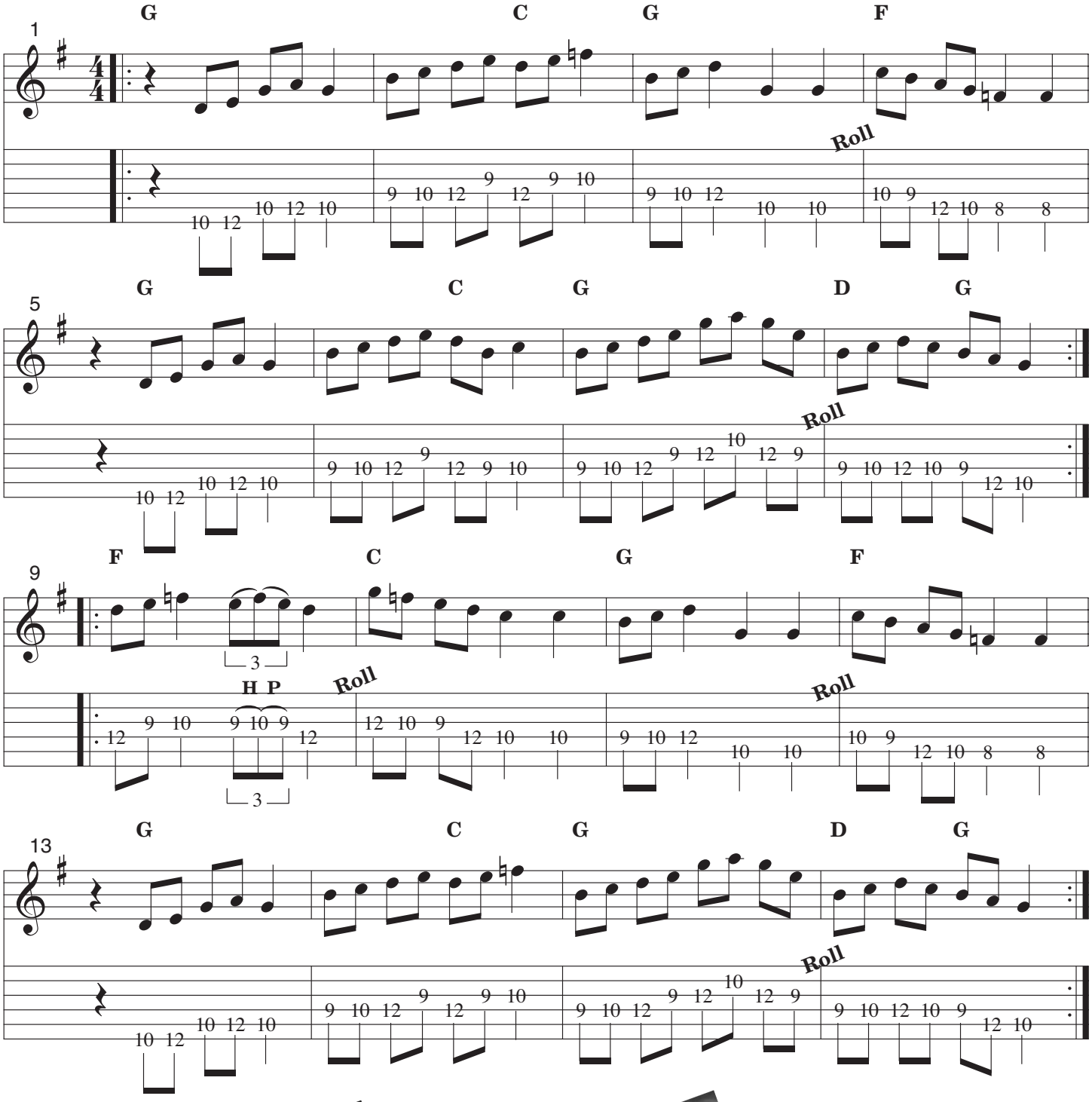
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Flatpick Rhythm Guitar

by Joe Carr

Playing Rhythm on Flatpicking Standards: Billy In The Lowground

Audio CD Track 10

At #10 on the top ten flatpick tunes list is a great fiddle tune in C, "Billy In The Lowground." I first heard this tune played by Clarence White. The recording was a World Pacific compilation LP which featured tunes from several albums including the Folkswingers (with Glen Campbell,) Tut Taylor and the Kentucky Colonels classic *Appalachian Swing*. I also heard a version on the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band album, *Uncle Charlie and his Dog, Teddy*.

Later I heard the tune played on the fiddle by a Texas style player accompanied with a different set of chord changes. Over the next few years, my confusion grew as I heard other recordings with more variations.

So what are the "right" changes to "Billy In The Lowground," anyway?

This really depends on who you ask. Let's start with the version Texas fiddlers like and is the most basic. In this version, there are only three chords: C, Am and G7. If you play an F chord, you will be dragged out of the jam session and given three lashes with a Fiddler's Frolics guitar strap!

"Billy In The Lowground" has two parts like many American fiddle tunes. Also like many other tunes, the A part is low and the B part is high. This change in octave was called the "coarse" and the "fine" by some old timers. In the Texas version, the A part and the B part use the same chord progression.

Here are three Texas variations:

#1A

C C Am Am
C C Am (G7 C)

#2A

C C Am Am
C C (Am G7) (G7C)

#3A

C C Am Am
C C G7 (G7 C)

Since each letter represents four beats, version #1 ends with two beats of G7 followed by two beats of C. In version #2, the Am in the second line gets only two beats followed by four beats of G7 and two beats of C. In version #3 there is no Am in the second line.

In the bluegrass world, the A section is generally played like #1 above. The B section usually contains the dreaded F chord. Here are two variations:

#1B

C C F F
C C Am (G7 C)

#2B

C C F F
C C F (G7 C)

Once again, the object is to make nice music and to make friends. Listen carefully to the lead players and try to complement what they play. Some lead arrangements may strongly suggest certain chords. The idea is to change your accompaniment as needed to suit the soloist. If your stock changes don't seem to work, try out some of these ideas.

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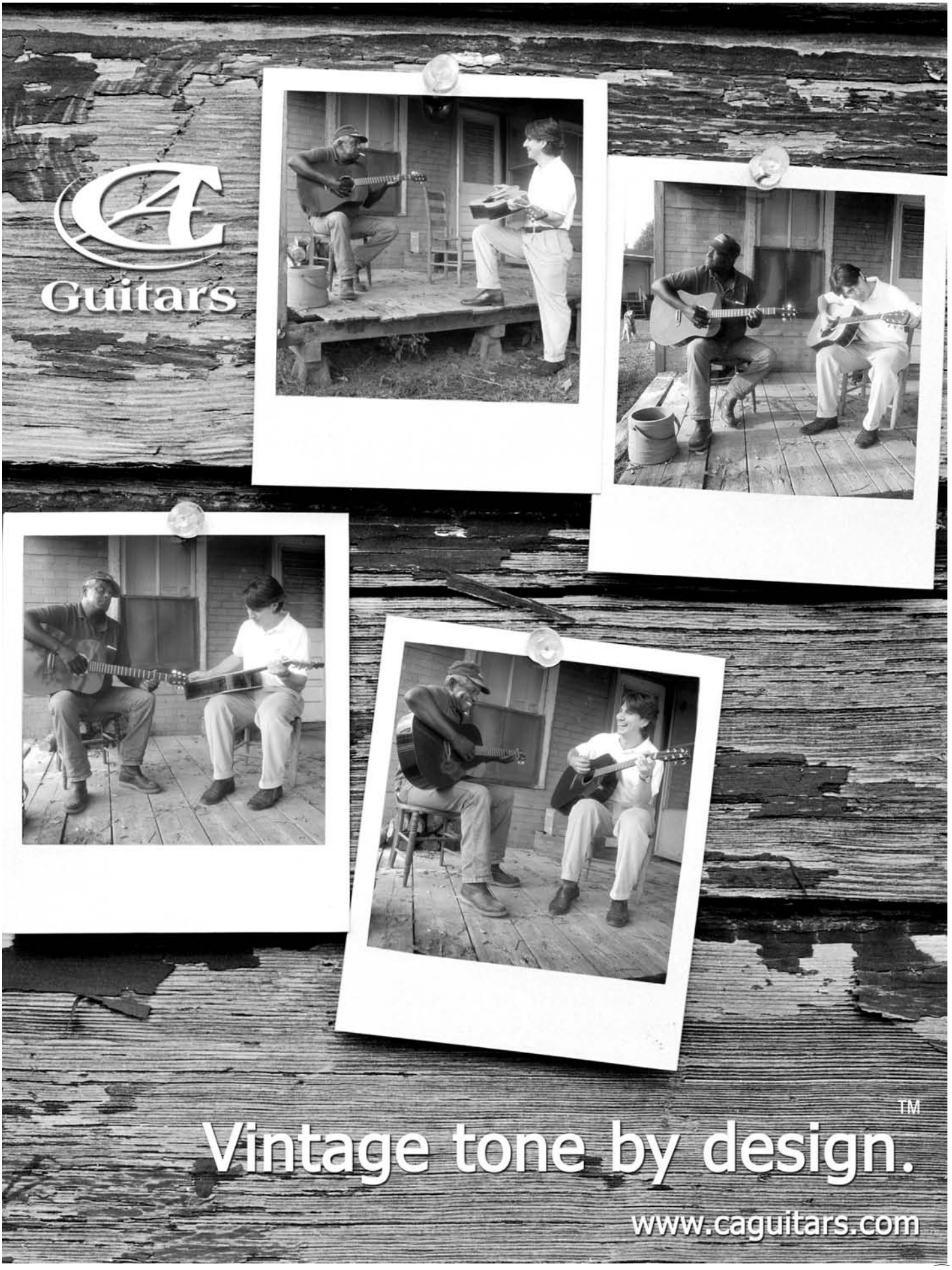
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Flatpicking & Folk/Acoustic Rock

by John Tindel

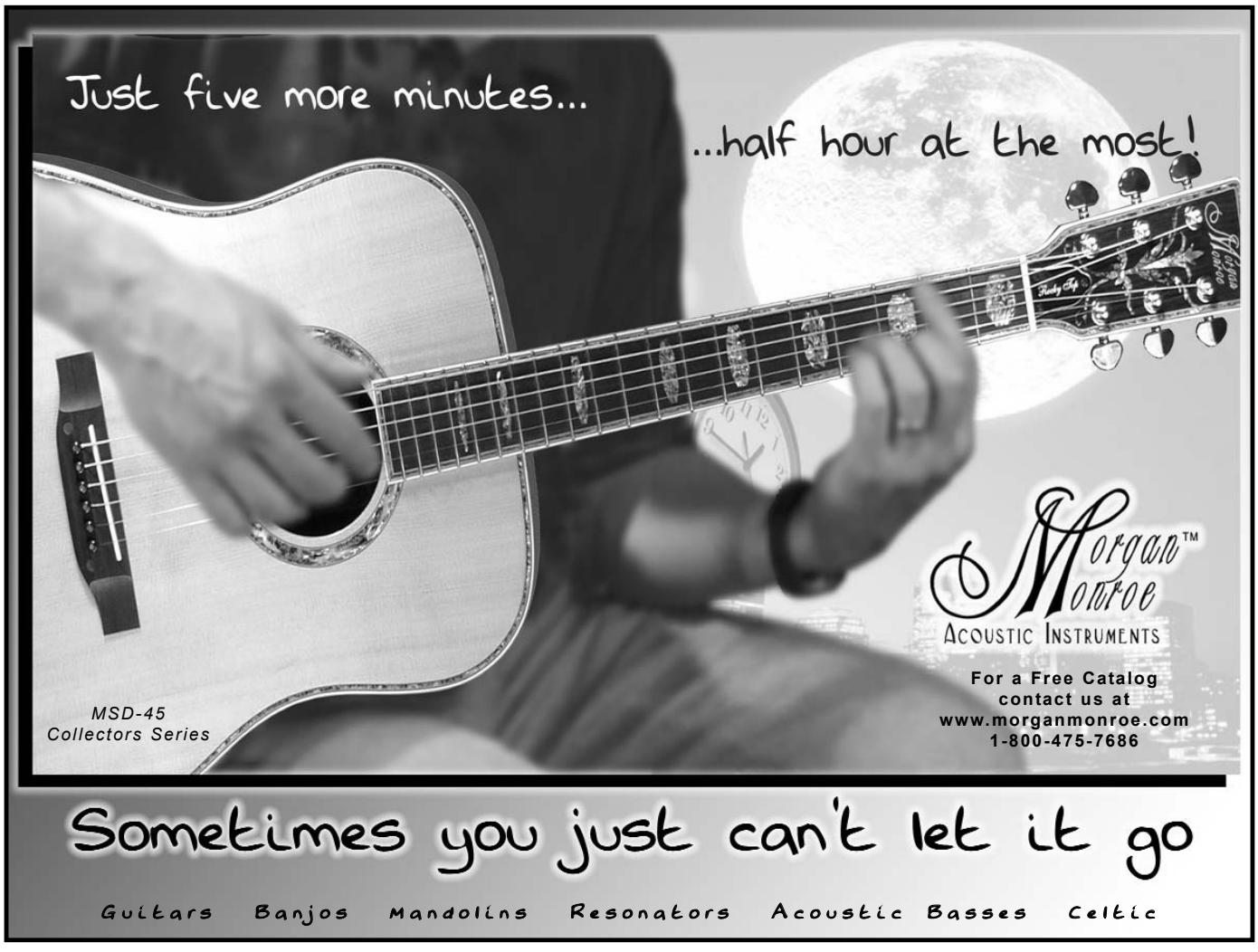
Seven Bridges Road

Hello again, music lovers. A while back I was in Nashville at a showcase club called 12th and Porter, sharing the bill with singer/songwriter Steve Young. He wrote the above-mentioned song, which was picked up by the Eagles. Their live recording of it became sort of a cult fave among the southern contingency and lovers of vocal harmony for its great four-part a cappella intro and outro. Steve told me that he'd originally written it as a slow tempo ballad song and only heard the Eagles version after it had been released. He said he was pretty shocked when the fast, foot-stompin' rhythm guitar part kicked in! I'm sure he felt better about it when the big royalty checks started rolling in as well!

I've always thought this would be a great tune for a flatpicked-style solo section, even though the Eagles' version doesn't feature one. It's pretty short and could use some fancy pickin', I say. So I took the opportunity to devise a little something that hopefully illustrates some of the things we've been working on in past columns -- hammer-ons and pull-offs, unison drone strings, double stops, etc. The solo happens over the verse chords (D C B/G D).

We kick off with a long stretch. Fret the 4th and 5th frets on the 5th string (A) with the third and fourth fingers and stretch your first finger down to the 2nd fret on the 3rd string (G). Arch your fingers and use just the tips so that the open D string in between can ring freely, creating our all-important drone string.

Be sure and clearly execute the fast hammered-on triplet figure at the top of the 2nd half and make good use of that open B string.



Audio CD
Tracks 11

Seven Bridges Road

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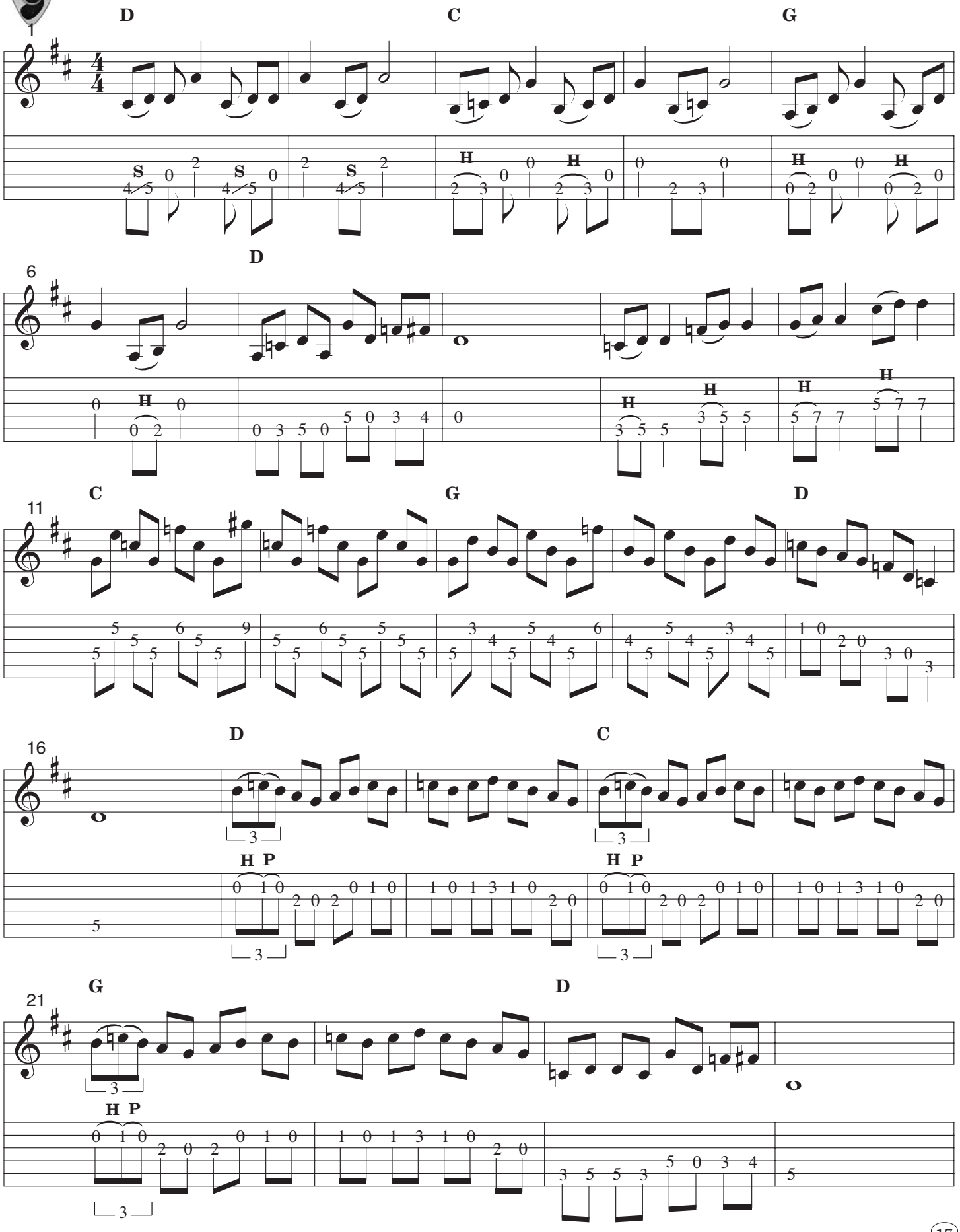
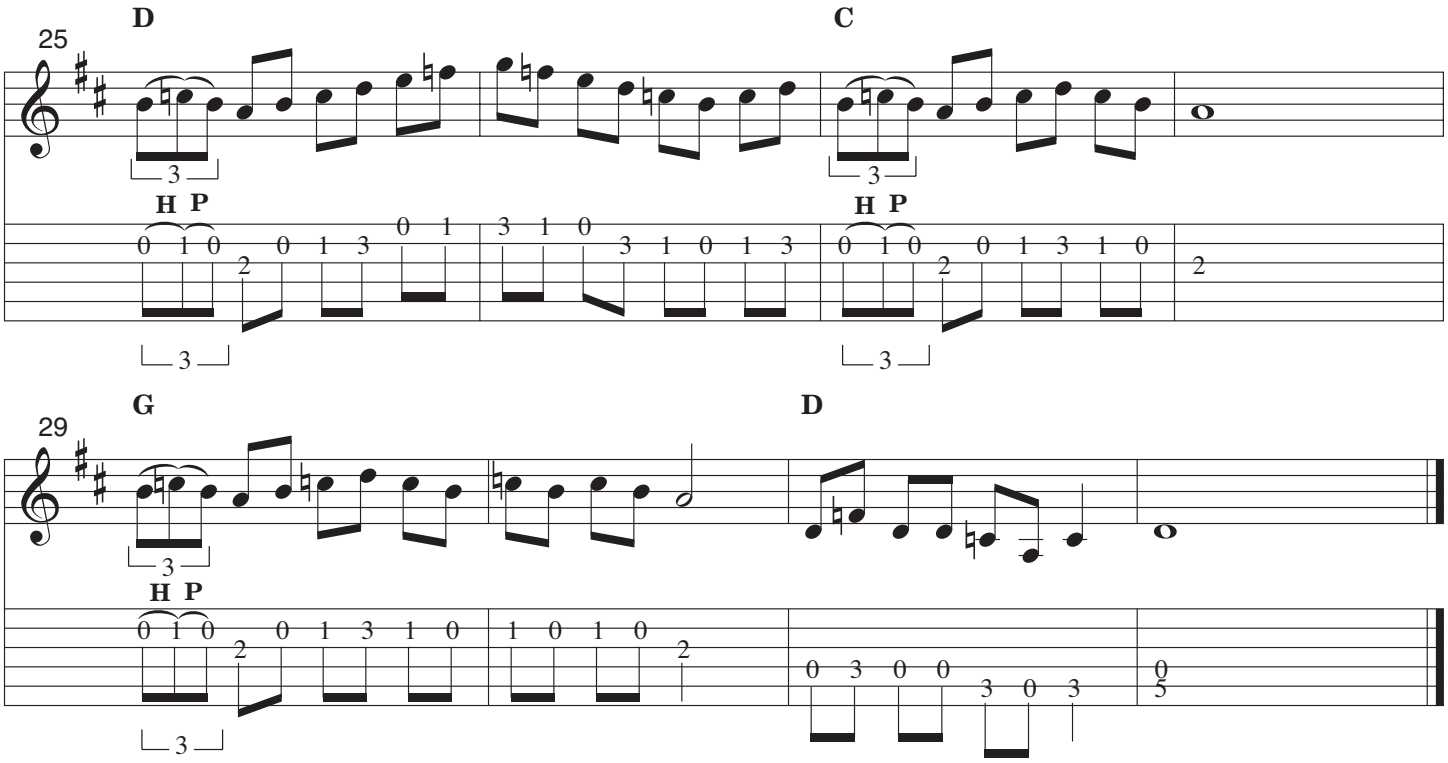

Seven Bridges Road



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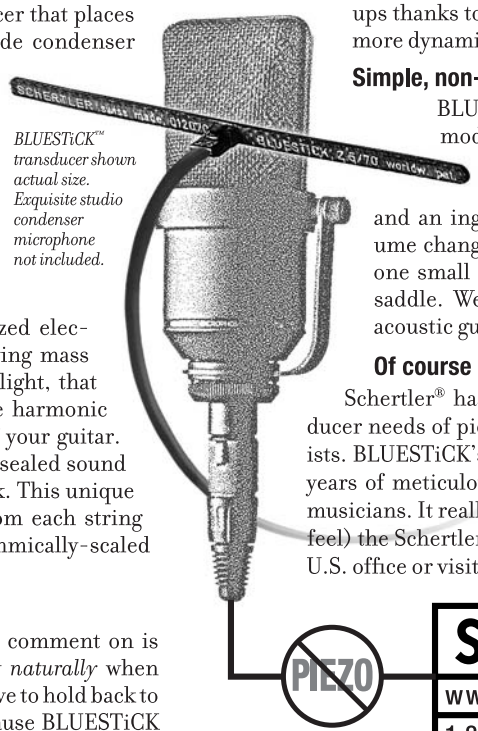

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Guitar Maintenance and Repair

by Frank Ford

Not a "Sinister Operation" Left Hand Conversion

My grandfather was a lefty - as a schoolboy he was forced to sit in a right handed desk, and he had to learn to write with his right hand. He said that the restrictive training resulted in his ambidexterity, although it seemed downright unfair at the time.

As a society, we haven't learned all that much in the intervening hundred years but at least we have learned the significance of respecting one's "handedness," so we no longer compel students to work backwards in class. Still, though, we encourage left handed people to learn to play music in the right handed position. Some instruments are more or less suited for either right or left handed people, because they require controlling rhythm and notation with both hands. Harps work either way around, we don't see a lot of left handed pianos or saxophones.

Rhythm is what music is all about, so it's really desirable to play guitar with your dominant hand doing the picking and strumming. If you're left handed and you have a strong left hand dominance, it's probably too dysfunctional for you to try to play right handed. In fact, I've known a couple of left handed guitarists who learned to play right handed, and eventually got the notion that they were fighting that dominance too hard. After switching to left handed instruments they reported an increased confidence and enjoyment within a few months. One of these folks had played seriously for fifteen years before making the switch!

Other lefties have told me that it was no big deal to work backwards, and that it felt reasonably natural to them. Certainly, these players are the lucky ones, because they don't have to seek out left handed guitars.

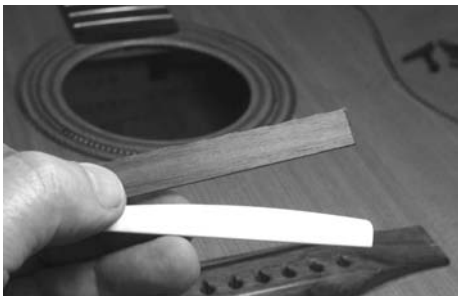
Until recently, getting a left handed guitar meant a custom order that carried a hefty surcharge. Nowadays, some large factories such as Martin and Taylor will provide true left handed guitars at the same price as their right handed counterparts.

Another perfectly acceptable source of a left handed guitar is a conversion, starting with a regular right handed instruments. Although the internal bracing may be asymmetrical, the relative tension of the six strings is approximately equal, so there's no structural danger in making the conversion to left handed stringing.

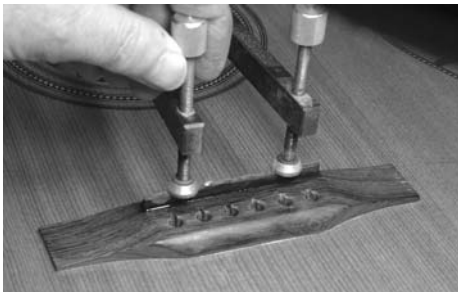
Clearly, a cutaway guitar is asymmetrical and would make a poor choice for conversion. But this 1980 Gurian model S-2 is an ideal candidate:

Not only is the body symmetrical, but it was originally made without a pickguard, so it can easily accommodate a left handed player. This guitar is shaped like a classical guitar, but unlike a classical guitar, it has a compensated saddle position, that is, the saddle is set at an angle so that the scale length is longer for the bass strings. Often a classical guitar can simply be strung backwards and used as a left handed instrument, but all steel string instruments need to have their saddles set in the proper compensated orientation.

My first job in setting up this guitar for a left handed player was to attack the bridge. I made a rosewood duplicate of the original bone saddle:



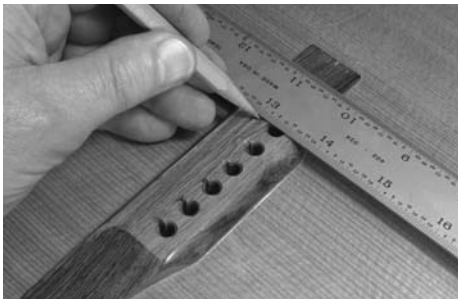
And, glued it in place to fill up the original saddle slot.



A bit of trimming with a chisel leveled my new rosewood insert to the surrounding bridge contour.

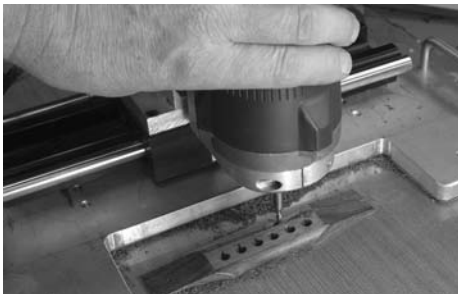
At this point, the bridge was solid as though it had never had a saddle in it, and I set about measuring the scale, judging the appropriate compensation, and marking the bridge for the new saddle position. If you look closely at the bridge, you may notice that my new saddle position is not only reversed from the original, but is also about an 1/8 inch farther back toward the bridge pin holes. Now, I could have made a "dedicated" left handed bridge to replace the original one, but I believe that job is not

only more expensive, it is also unnecessary, and definitely more intrusive to the integrity of the guitar.



It was quite clear according to my calculation that this guitar had played sharp up the neck because of the saddle position that made the scale a bit too short. That meant there was an added bonus to all this work —I was able to make the guitar play with better intonation.

I set up my saddle slot milling fixture and routed the new saddle slot in the correct location:

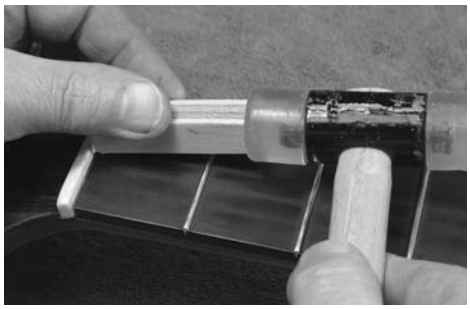


Because my new slot was a trifle wider than the original, and slightly different in depth, I also made a new saddle for the guitar. I'm leaving that process out of this article to save space, and because I've covered it in a previous article. Same for the making of the nut.

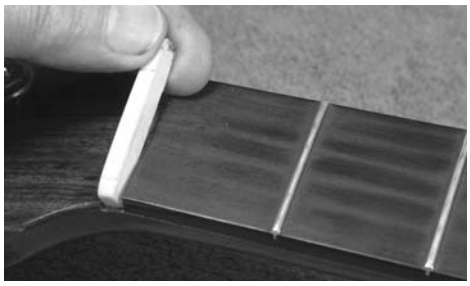
The string notches needed to be widened for the bass strings which would be switched into the old treble string holes.

No need to try to make the old bass string notches narrower, because they would hold the treble strings nicely as they were. Now the bridge was all set. Here's a close view of the completed left hand bridge setup, after the guitar was restrung:

Out came the old nut:



And, in went the new:



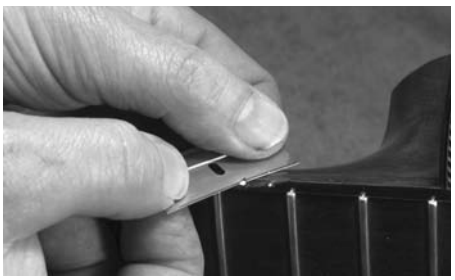
I could have set the old nut up to work with the reversed string positions, but the skinny treble strings would have looked funny in the wide bass string slots. The owner of the guitar and I both agreed that a new nut would be a much nicer choice. It is, after all, a fine professional quality guitar it it deserves the best treatment.

Once I had the action set up at the nut, the structural conversion was complete.

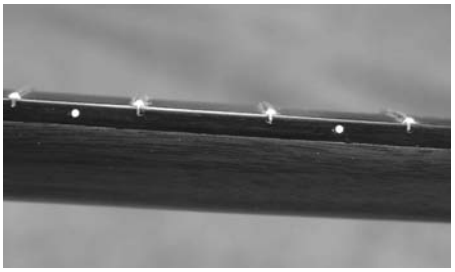
To make the guitar more playable in the left handed position, I marked out the side fret position markers, and drilled holes to inlay the white plastic dots.

A 1/16" plastic rod glued into a 1/16" hole makes an ideal side dot, and is standard fare on these Gurian guitars. Martin, and many others use similar size dots.

I trimmed the rods off as closely as I could cut with a single edge razor blade:



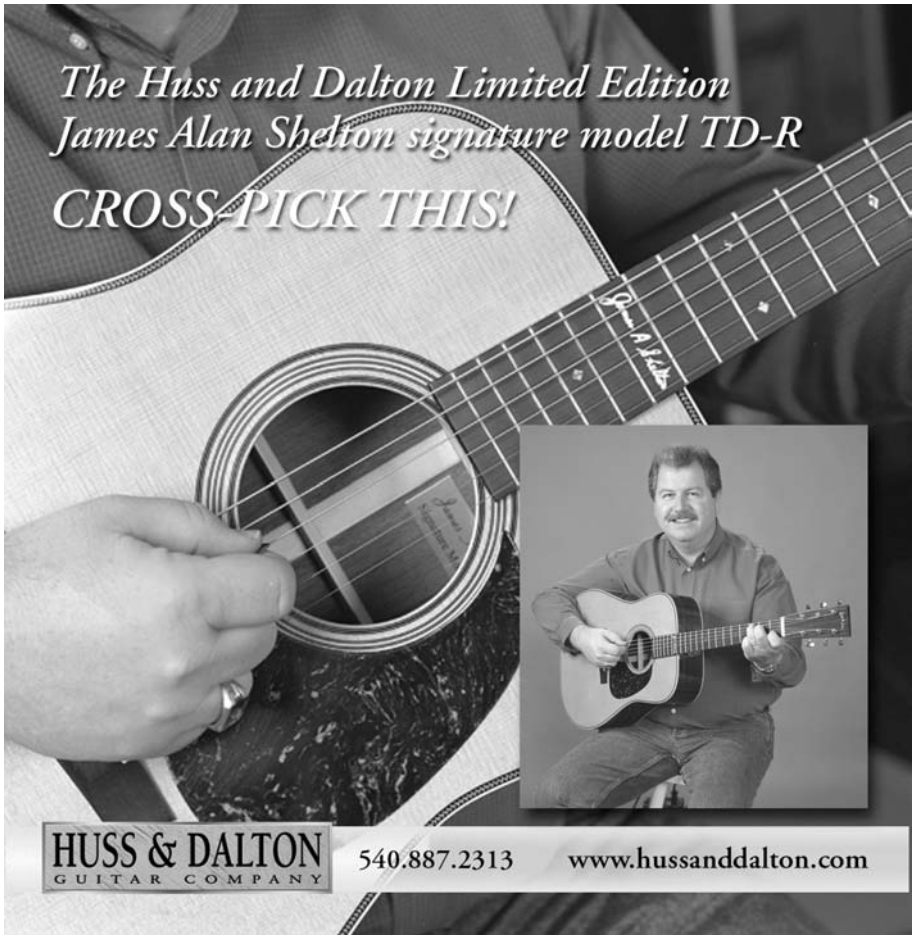
Then, all it took was a bit of leveling and polishing to get the dots to look as though they had originally been inlaid on this side of the fingerboard:



The white plastic polished up nice and shiny, just like the surrounding lacquer finish. At that point, my conversion was complete and the guitar was ready to do duty as a left handed instrument. It still had its asymmetrical top bracing, but it sounded just fine as a lefty. In fact, most players and

guitar mechanics I've talked to agree that a left handed conversion has just about the same tonal qualities as it did before conversion. Nobody I know has reported hearing any difference at all. While that may seem a bit far fetched, do remember that there is not a universal agreement as to the significance of the small asymmetry inside a standard steel string instrument, and in fact, some makers have purposely made their bracing symmetrical, or asymmetrical but opposite to the conventional.

But, what if the original guitar had a pickguard? Well, there's not a lot we can do about that, so we often see this result:



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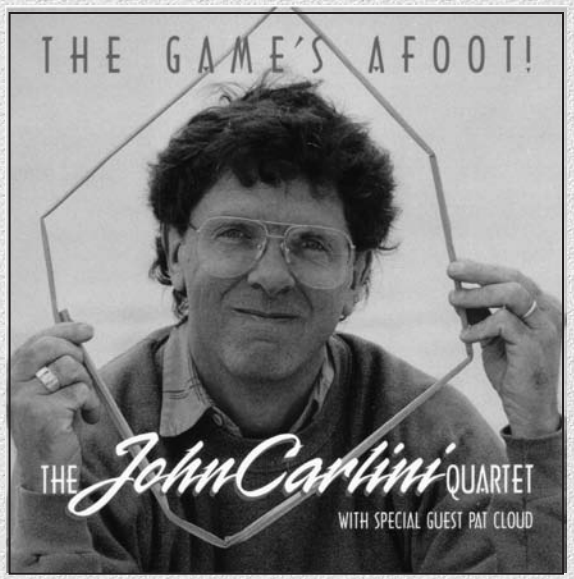

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Kaufman's Corner

by Steve Kaufman

Blackberry Rag
The Elusive Up Swing

Hi friends and let's talk right hand stuff again! I was always told by fiddlers that if you don't have a good right hand you ain't got nuttin' (mob fiddle talk). The right hand is a pendulum as well as your metronome. It should swing back and forth, which is up and down, freely and without too much energy and thought. It just goes down and up for every beat.

My basic rule in flatpicking is "hit every note." I try to arrange my materials so that the stems on the notes dictate right hand action. All quarter notes are hit down. All eighth notes alternate down then up. If you see a hammer-on, pull-off or slide in eighth notes, the direction of the first note hammered, pulled or slid is the direction of the next note to be hit. Eighth notes by themselves are almost always up swings. Look at my sheet to find these examples. Sit and stare at them until you can relate to the above paragraph.

Look at the first measure. I have written in the count. Count it out loud a few times "1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +" again and again. Now move your right hand down on the number and up on the "+". Don't hit any strings. Do this over and over (I'll wait). Now, with the wrist moving and your tongue counting: think E, F, F#, G (the first four notes). Count again while moving and think da, da, da, DA. You should hear accents in your head as well as the timing of the pick-up notes of the phrase if you are relaxed and swinging the wrist and counting. Remember you are not actually hitting a note at the point. It is all in the right hand and the mind.

Measure 2 or the end of the first "C" measure has a dotted quarter note then an eighth. The count/timing is marked. Practice the same thing here. Say the numbers by counting the beats while the wrist is moving. Then think the notes to be played until you "hear it" and feel it in your head. Then you should be able to play it. If you feel or hear in you head, accents or stronger notes, replay them that way.

This entire tune was arranged with a maximum of double ups or double downs. It may be excessive but hopefully it will demonstrate a point of the pendulum right hand. Have fun with this great tune and see you down the road somewhere.

Steve K

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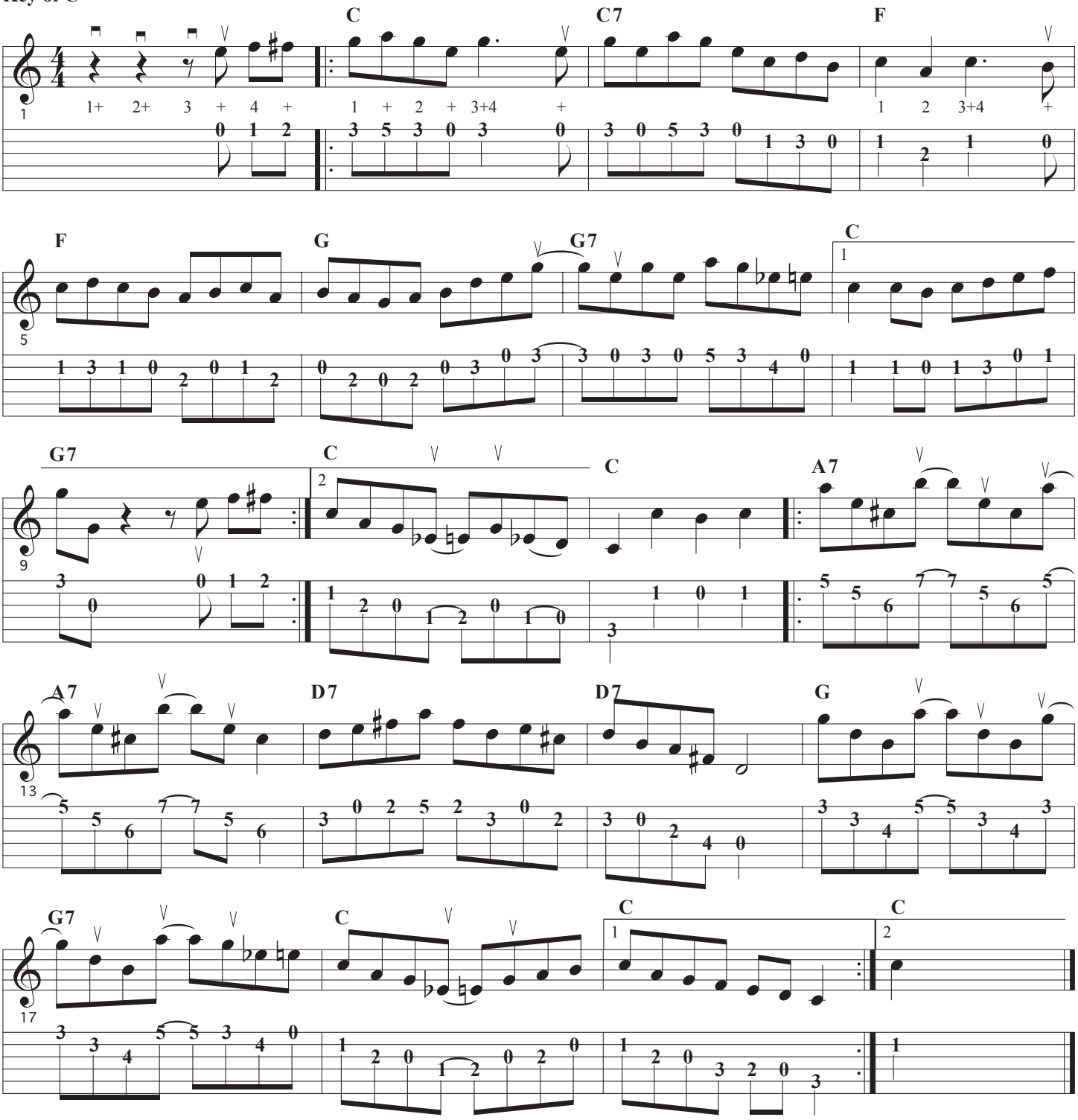
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Adventures in Acoustic Music: BeBop Style Study

by John Carlini

We have finally arrived at Bebop in our adventure in various styles of improvised music! Since Bebop is a form of jazz, I decided to just ad lib the solo, then transcribe it. (The improvement in the sound of my recording in this issue is due to the competent and talented assistance of guitar tech/Apple wiz, Peter Becker, as engineer! Thanks, Peter!)

One of the main characteristics of Bebop is the addition of chords—lots of 'em! Actually, if you still have the issue on bluegrass style (Jan/Feb 2003, FGM Vol7, No2) issue, you can compare the chords. Somewhere in the evolution of jazz, chord progressions became known simply as "changes."

In the bluegrass version, we had two bars of G going to C on the third bar. In this version, the G becomes G6 for one bar. The second bar is a II-V progression leading to the C6 chord. You could say that it is the II-V of the IV chord, or II-V/IV. The C# diminished is a chromatic approach to the G/D. And so it develops. Lots of II-Vs, and lots of chromatic additions. Look at measure seven. Where did that Bbm7 to Eb9 II-V come from? It's just a chromatic approach to the next bar, Am7 to D7. It would take a lot more space than we have here to analyze the whole thing. For now I would suggest that you simply listen and watch the music. If you hear a phrase that you like, work with it. Listen to how the phrases reflect the "changes."

Recommended listening is anything by the "founding fathers" of bebop: Charlie "Bird" Parker, "Dizzy" (John Birks) Gillespie, Theolonious Monk,and Miles Davis (40s to 60s). On guitar, listen to Joe Pass, Pat Martino, Tal Farlow, and Kenny Burrell. As in bluegrass, there are lots of great players in bebop, lots of great music. Your musical world will be enriched!

Please visit John's web site, www.johncarlini.com for the latest performance info and acoustic music news. Check out the new CD by the John Carlini Quartet , The Game's Afoot!, featuring Don Stiernberg w/special guest Pat Cloud at www.fgmrecords.com.

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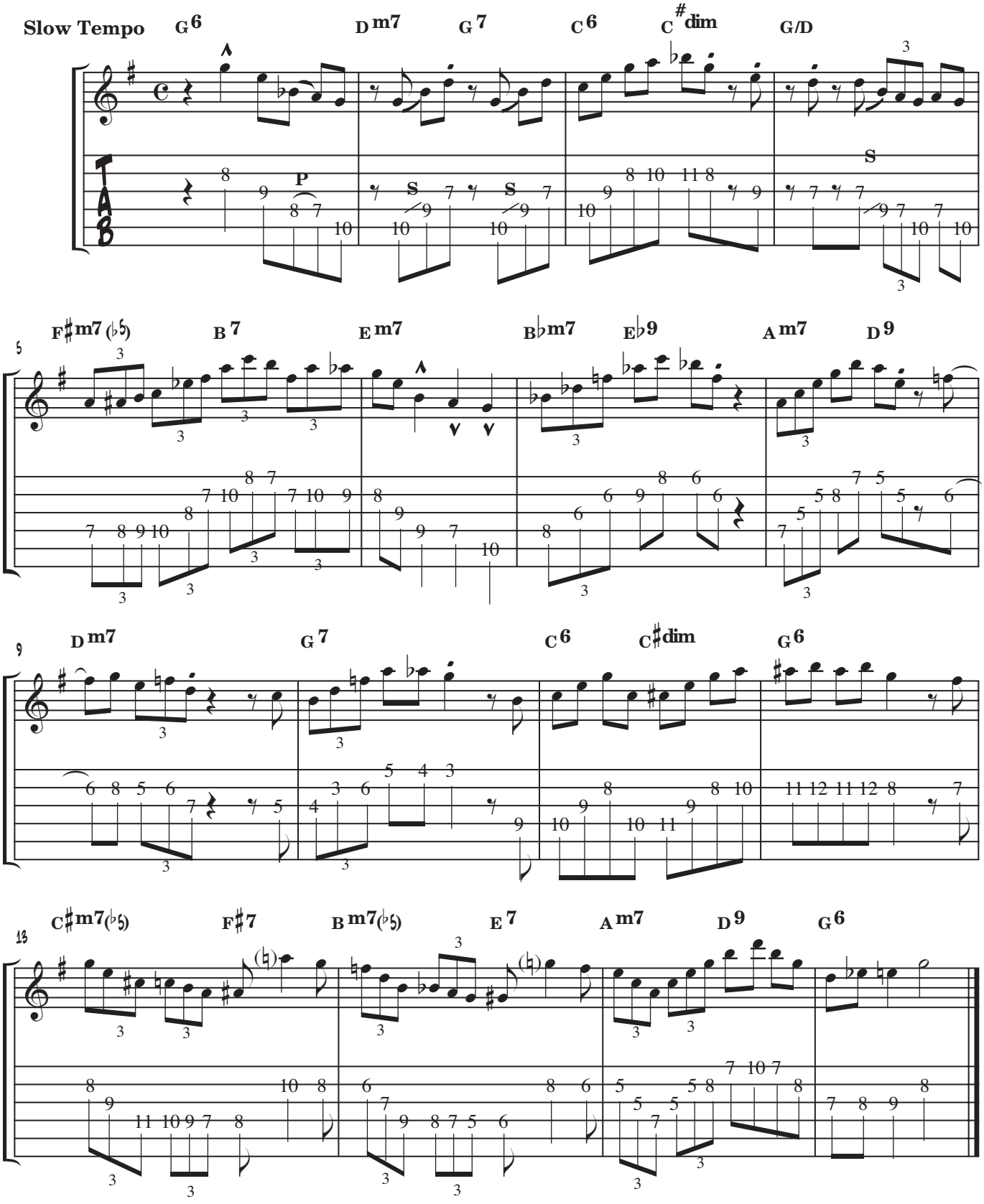
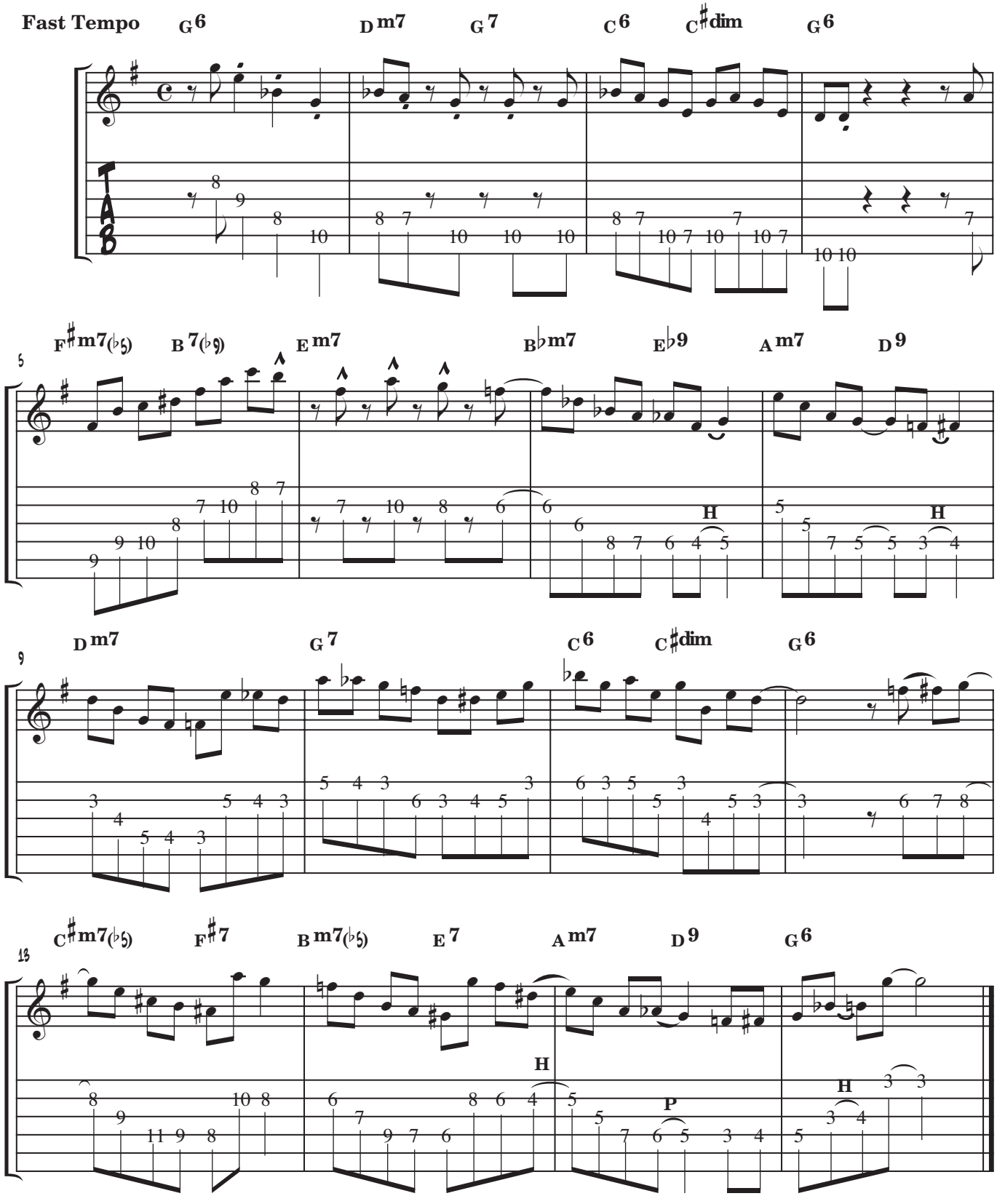
Black Mountain Rag (Kenny, David, & Wyatt)

Audio CD
Track 26

Bebop Style (slow)

Audio CD
Track 27

Bebop Style (fast)

Flatpick Profile: David Doucet

by Dan Miller

During a recent interview with David Doucet, BeauSoleil's guitar player, I learned a few things that surprised me. The first was that David's famous brother, Michael, was originally a guitar player who didn't decide to give the fiddle a try until he was in his early twenties. The other surprise was that David himself had no interest in learning how to play Cajun music until he was "challanged" to learn a few Cajun songs for his sister's wedding in 1974. BeauSoleil has been performing for over 25 years and has been dubbed "America's most popular Cajun group." Garrison Keller, host of *A Prairie Home Companion*, has called them "the best Cajun band in the world." You would naturally assume that these brothers from Lafayette, Louisiana—in the heart of Cajun country—would have been playing Cajun music since they were young kids, but this was not the case.

David, who began learning how to play the guitar when he was a sophomore in high school, said that although he had heard Cajun music all his life he was not interested in it because the Cajun music that he heard was all electric and he only wanted to play the acoustic guitar. When his brother Michael, six years his senior, took a job in California, David picked up a guitar that Michael had left at home and began learning to play out of a Bob Dylan songbook. When Michael came back a year later, he began teaching David how to fingerpick and told him, "You have to hear Doc Watson." Michael picked up Doc's first recording during a trip to New Orleans and brought it back home. David remembers, "It was awesome. I had to learn how to sound like that and play like that."

Although enamored with Doc's playing, David admits that he could not figure out exactly what Doc was doing until he met Raoul Breaux, a banjo player in Lafayette. David said, "Raoul showed me 'Billy in the Lowground' off Doc's record. I immediately made a connection and my entire world lit up. I said, 'That is it!' I understood the technique and what you were supposed to do."

BeauSoleil has "gained international renown for their inspired interpretation of traditional Cajun music and their innovation in 'Cajunizing' other musical styles—jazz, Caribbean, or even Tex-Mex," and in the process David Doucet has done something similar for the acoustic guitar. Prior to BeauSoleil's 1977 debut album *The Spirit of Cajun Music*, the guitar was a rhythm instrument in that genre. David has successfully integrated his love for Doc Watson's flatpicking with BeauSoleil's music and thus introduced the acoustic guitar as a lead instrument in the Cajun setting.

Doc Watson was not David's only flatpicking inspiration. About the same time that BeauSoleil's first recording was released, David discovered Clarence White. David said, "As enlightening as Doc was, with his smooth, straight solos and his understanding of rhythm and drive, Clarence was like putting dynamite on top of it. Through listening to Clarence I realized that you could mess with the envelope, you could do wild rhythm stuff and accent rhythm notes. After I discovered Clarence I got myself a Martin reissue D-28 that had a good low end for those Clarence-like low end bass runs."

In fact, David's first guitar solos with the band were predominantly derived from bass runs. He explains, "Back then the band didn't have a bass player and usually didn't have a drummer—we had one or two fiddles, an accordion, sometimes percussion and sometimes mandolin. With no bass in the band, my guitar was the low end. So I started doing these bass solos." His rhythm was also peppered with bluegrass style bass runs. "The accordion player thought it was great," David recalls. "The rhythm was still there, but it was somewhere else, which was cool."

In addition to studying the flatpicking styles of Doc Watson and Clarence White, David also began to explore the rhythm styles of traditional Cajun guitar players such as Rodney Balfa and Preston Manual. He also got a weekly gig playing rhythm guitar for a 90-year-old accordion player. David feels that it is the rhythm of music that makes it identifiable and it is the most important element in Cajun music, which is predominately dance music. He felt it was important to explore the traditional rhythm styles of the older Cajun guitar players, but then, under the influence of Clarence White, he also began to develop "alternative styles." "Clarence's approach broadened my view and motivated me to expand the music but still stay in the rhythm of the music."

About 1983, as David was finishing his masters' degree in English, the band started getting regular gigs and hired a bass player. "When we started playing regular gigs," David recalls, "my chops got a lot better. Michael started giving me more leads and

since we now had a bass player I could start using the four other strings on the guitar that I never knew existed except when I was playing rhythm. I was listening to Doc, Clarence, and Tony Rice and trying to figure out how far I could go with it. I would have one break in every song and my goal was to always play it differently."

Although he points to Doc Watson, Clarence White and Tony Rice as influences, one thing David has worked to avoid is sounding like a bluegrass guitar player. "I have tried to develop a lead style that doesn't sound bluegrass or country. Scott Fore pointed out that he thought my lead playing had an accordion-like sound. I think that is because my lead style is a reflection of the rhythm of the music. When you play dance music the rhythm of the notes is most important."

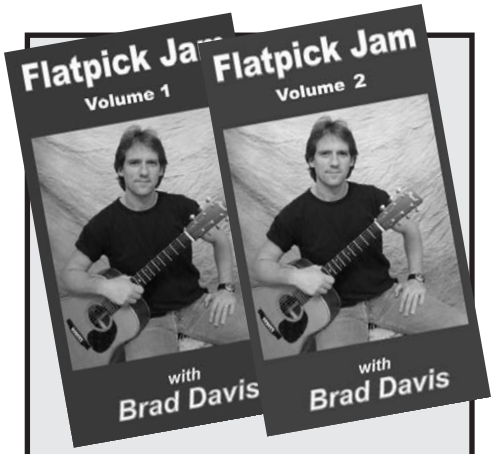
Looking back at his development as both a rhythm and lead guitar player, David notes that experience playing with other people is the key to constant improvement. He says, "You need experience playing with other people to learn how to blend with others. I had the good fortune of playing with older people. In the band I am always working on locking into the rhythm with the bass player and the drummer."

In 1984 David moved from Lafayette to New Orleans and accepted a job programming Louisiana bands at the World's Fair. In addition to having the opportunity to hire, meet, and hear great jazz, R&B, and blues players, he also played as a solo act at the World's Fair seven days a week for three months. The opportunity to perform solo eventually led to him working up material to cut his 1990 solo album, *Quand J'ai Parti*, on which he showcased the acoustic guitar as a lead instrument. On that project he was backed by members of BeauSoleil, plus Dobro master Josh Graves and bassist John Stewart.

After completing graduate school David held a teaching position from 1984 through 1986, while continuing to play with BeauSoleil on weekends. However, in 1986 he decided to play music professionally and has pursued music full-time ever since. Although he has continued to develop his fingerpicking style to function in a solo environment, and cut a second solo album which predominately featured fingerstyle guitar, he says, "With BeauSoleil playing 180 gigs a year I have never had the time to peruse the solo thing." Looking towards the future, David adds, "I am toying with the idea of a flatpicking record."

Of the twenty recordings BeauSoleil has released over the past 25 years, David is most proud of this guitar work on the CD *Cajunization*. This project was produced by bluegrass guitar player extraordinaire Charles Sawtelle. David said, "We had never had a guitar player as a producer. Charles gave me free reign and he liked what I did. He said that it blended and it fit. His nod of acceptance was a good validation for me."

When discussing his approach to guitar playing in general, David says that the first goals are "the rhythm, and that everyone is one time and together." Once the rhythm and timing have been established, he likes to start simply, play the melody, and leave holes in time. With the band he likes to take his solo after the first vocal. He states the melody and plays straight. After that has been established, he likes to get creative with the rhythm. "I like to add bass runs and accented rhythm to provide texture, but then I'll close it up at the end by coming back to something simple." Even though David likes to "step out" a bit with his rhythm work, he said that he would never do it unless the rhythm and timing is right. Good rhythm and timing have to be established before anyone tries to get creative.



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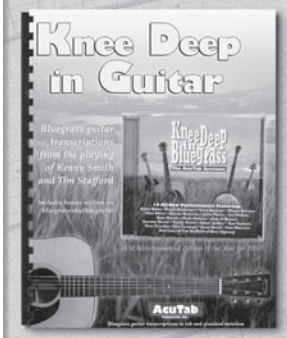

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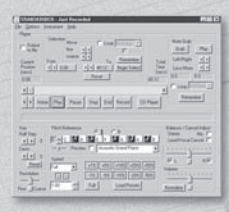

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1. Reuben's Train
2. Dark Hollow
3. I'm Going Back to Old Virginny
4. Eight More Miles to Louisville
5. The Banks of the Ohio
6. Think of What You've Done
7. Poppies
8. Railroad Bill
9. The Golden Slippers
10. Jimmie Brown the Newsboy
11. Sitting on Top of the World
12. Beautiful Brown Eyes
13. I'll Love Nobody But You
14. Mike's Marathon
15. I'm on My Way, But I'll Be Back Someday

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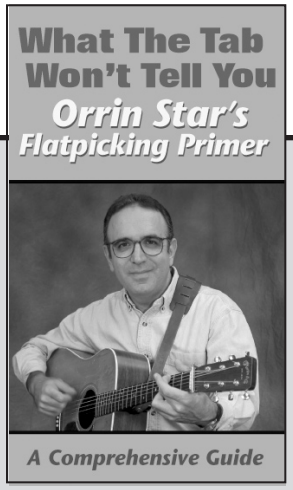
He adds, "When playing solo it is the same. Sometimes when you are playing the feel isn't right—it is not happening. So you go back to the basics. Sometimes it is hard to know that."

David has been a fan of Collings guitars for years. He met Bill Collings in 1978 at a bar in Austin, TX. Since there were no good repair people in Louisiana, Bill became David's repair guy. In 1987 David bought an Indian rosewood D2 from Collings and began touring with it; however, it was stolen. His brother Michael owned a Brazilian rosewood Collings D2 that he loaned to David until Collings made one for him in 1993. Later Bill Collings told him, "You need one of these OM models" and David got one in 1994. David says, "I never went into the store and bought a Collings. Bill always made them custom for me. He would watch me play, noticed how hard I played and decided what kind of top I would need. The OM records beautifully. Dreadnoughts have a lot of low end. To have a good smooth rhythm style, I think the OM is better. The Collings guitars have a great tone and they don't let you down. They travel well and they feel good. For a working guitar there is nothing else that I would rather have." David's main guitar is a Brazilian Collings OM2, and he also owns a maple Collings SJ.

Regarding his on-board gear David says, "When you have a drummer in the band, you can't play through microphones. Over the years I have tried every kind of pickup you can imagine. I have done them all. I played with the B-band for the past four years and I liked it except it is very sensitive to set up. If you have to take out your saddle, you are in trouble. Recently Scott Fore installed a Schertler Bluestick in my OM and I love the even natural guitar sound that I get out of it."

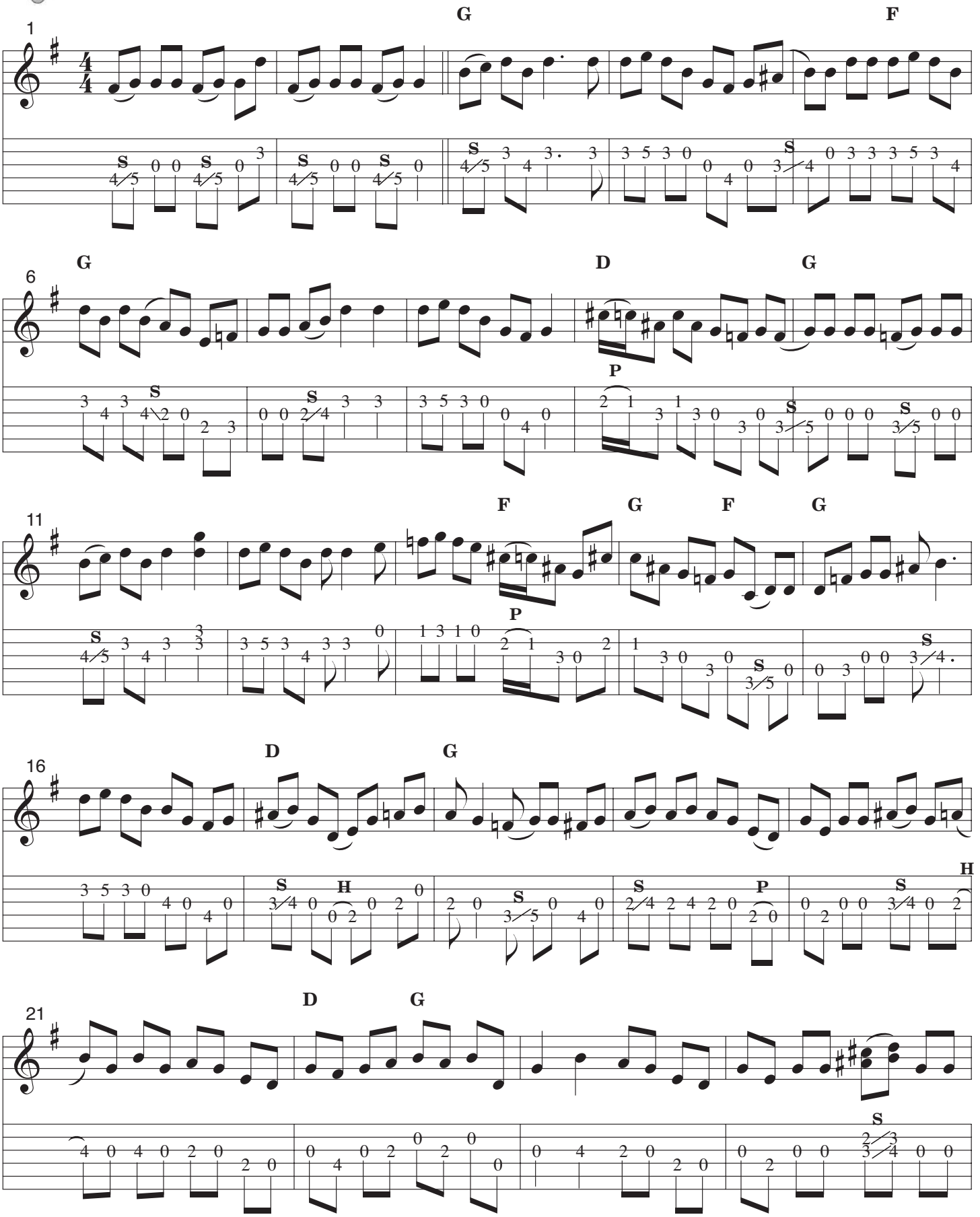
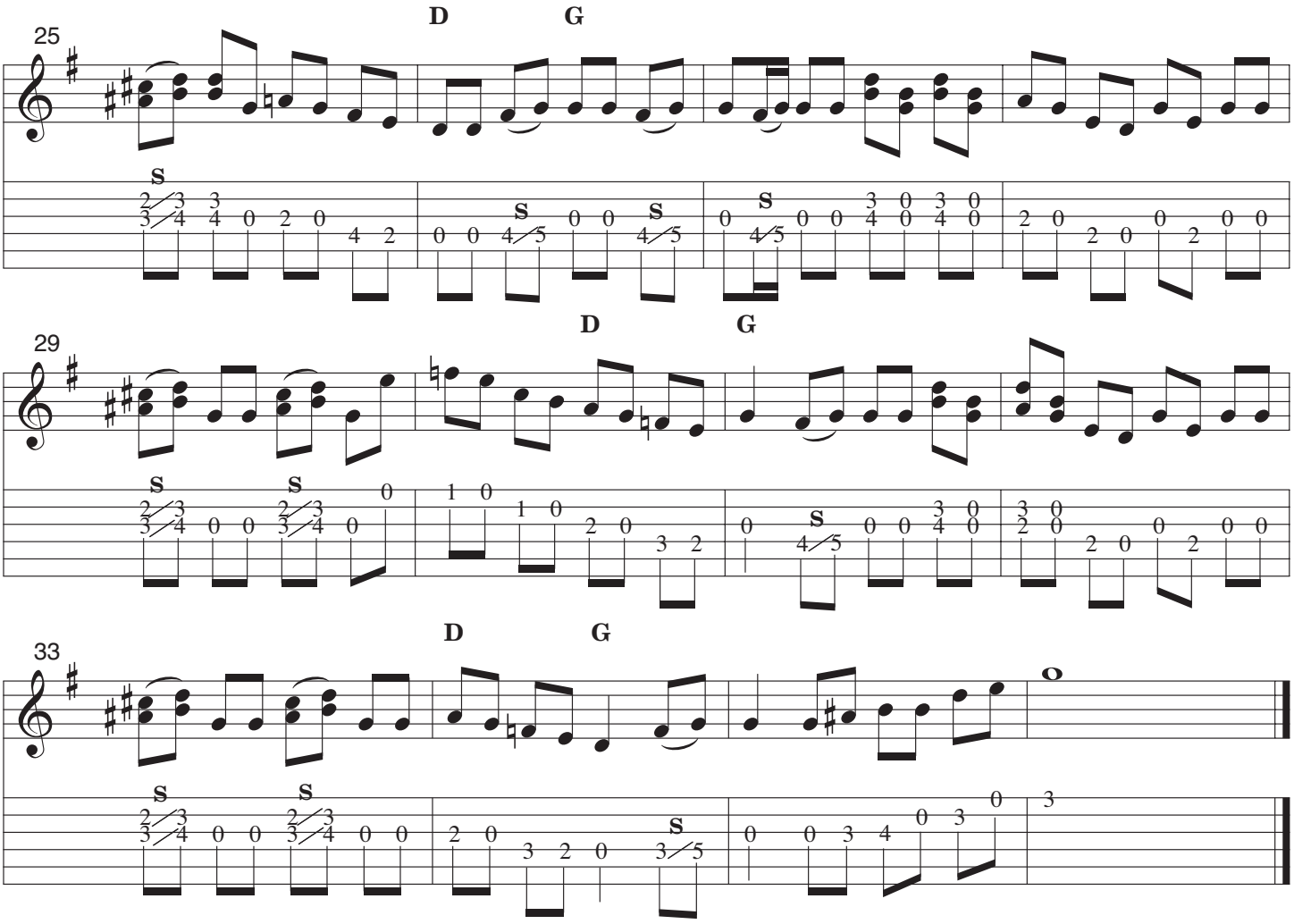
Like his band, BeauSoleil, David Doucet is an innovator. He learned the flatpick guitar style by listening to the masters—Doc Watson, Clarence White, and Tony Rice—and he effectively incorporated their technique into the rhythms of Cajun dance music. In doing so he has created a rhythm and lead acoustic guitar style that is all his own. He has been called "one of roots music's most innovative guitarists." His band played events surrounding Jimmy Carter's 1976 inauguration, they saw their song "Zydeco Gris-Gris" used in the opening tracking shot for *The Big Easy*, they played the Super Bowl with Mary Chapin Carpenter and they won one Grammy and have been nominated for seven others. If you haven't heard David's music, do yourself a favor and check it out.



Orrin Star's *Flatpicking Gutiar Primer* is now available on DVD! Call 800-413-8296

Audio CD
Track 29

I Went To The Dance

Arranged by David Doucet
Transcribed by Brad Davis

I Went To The Dance (con't)

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A comprehensive introduction to bluegrass lead guitar playing by one of America's top flatpicking teachers, this video brings to light vital, yet often overlooked, subtleties that are at the heart of this exciting style—those things that the tablature won't tell you. Among them:

- how to think like a fiddler and get the "dance pulse" into your playing
- the central role of strums in lead playing (as applied to Carter-style and Blake-style)
- right hand fundamentals like: how to properly alternate your pick, how to modify your right hand technique when strumming, performing double-stops, and rest strokes
- the role of double-stops and harmonized leads
- using lyrics & singing styles to guide your solos

Starting with a simple scale and then progressing through eight cool arrangments of classic tunes, this 2-hour video doesn't just spoon feed you solos—it provides a systematic guide to the thinking behind and within the style.

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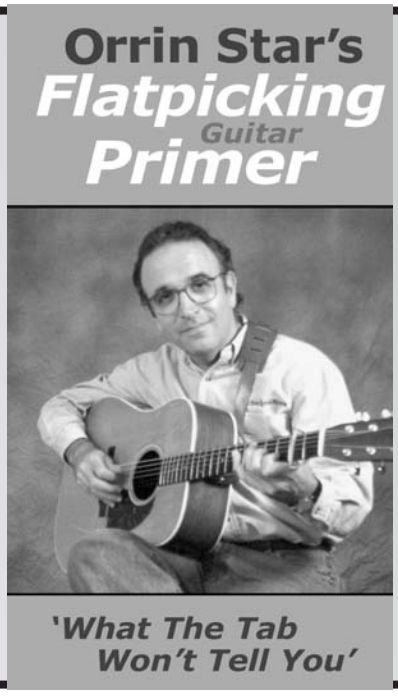


Nickerson Guitars

by Joseph Shinn

Although his interest in the Dreadnought guitar has begun to grow in the last three or four years Brad Nickerson has been building fine guitars for twenty years now. He is a leading builder of arch top guitars and small jumbo, 15" and 16" flat tops which are the main stay of his flat top building. These are versatile guitars which can be fingerpicked or flatpicked. His instruments have been offered by Eldery Instruments and are played by noted flat top players Brooks Williams and Jim Henry. He built a blue arch top for Scott Chinery's now well known blue guitar collection. He also teaches guitar building offering individual instruction in building both flat top and arch top guitars.

Brad Nickerson's guitars are notable for a rich, complex tonal quality which is strong and focused, particularly in the mid range and trebles. The tone is rich and powerful all the way up the neck and should be especially appealing to lead players. His guitars are definitely not attempts to duplicate or reproduce the venerable vintage Dreadnought tone we all love, but rather to expand the range of tonal options available to players today. A few months ago I had an opportunity to speak with Brad about his career and his approach to guitar building.

Can you tell us how you began building guitars?

I originally started out as a player and spent some time, about a year, from '82-'83 at Berklee. I had always enjoyed woodworking and at some point someone gave me a kit. I also worked repairing guitars at Baystate Vintage Instruments in Boston for a couple of years. During that time, around 1983, I built my first few guitars. Soon after I moved to western Massachusetts and worked repairing guitars at Fretted Instruments in Amherst. After doing that for a while, I decided I really wanted to devote myself to building full time.

What were the first guitars you built?

I began with flat tops, but as a jazz player I had this romance with arch tops. I liked the way they looked but was not satisfied with how they sounded and thought I could do better. I began building arch tops in 1985. In retrospect, I am beginning to wonder... it may have been a little presumptuous of me (laughs). I am still developing my instruments and feel I have made some break through lately, borrowing a bit from Stromberg. The early flat tops I made were my own shapes (since I really like the design aspect of building) but conventionally braced.

When you consider the tone you are trying to achieve with flat tops, have you any preferences for top woods?

Well, I believe any of the premier woods, Adirondack, German, Engelmann or Sitka can all make a great guitar. It's hard to compare really unless you could do it all on the same guitar. I like the clarity or purity of German spruce, but find it some what less interesting tonally. Sitka and Adirondack seem more alike to me though Adirondack can be warmer and richer. Engelmann seems similar to European, but sometimes a bit softer. For a Dreadnought, my preference would be Adirondack, followed by Sitka.

What are your thoughts on tone woods for bodies?

I like mahogany a lot. It's an excellent tone wood that is much undervalued, though it is gaining more recognition recently. Rosewood has a little harder edge tonally. I don't think it has more bass, let's say, really but more depth. It rings more because it is heavier. Koa has a little harder, drier edge than mahogany. Tonally, it falls somewhere between mahogany and maple. I've occasionally used Brazilian, Cocobolo, Walnut, Jatoba, and different Maple. They have their own unique character but what I tell prospective customers is that my guitars sound more like each other than they sound like instruments of the same woods by other makers.

Your necks are interesting. I find them among the most user-friendly that I have ever played. Can you describe them?

I often use walnut necks on rosewood guitars. I like the color match and I find walnut to be very similar to mahogany in stiffness. I generally build one and three quarter inch at the nut, but this really depends on the

player's preference. I use a dovetail joint to the body. I put quite a bit of radius on the fingerboard, and give careful attention to how the fingerboard fairs into the neck and turns in at the top edge. I think that contributes to the feeling of comfort. Also, I always bind the edges of the fingerboard, if not contrasting binding I use Ebony, so the fret tangs are not visible on the edge.

What are your preferences for bridges, bridge pins, nuts, saddles, etc . . . .?

For bridges I prefer Macassar ebony and I generally use ebony bridge pins. For the nut and saddle I use bone, and for bindings I use cherry, maple, or holly unless someone requests otherwise. I generally don't like synthetic materials.

Your adjustment for the neck is on the head stock. Why is that?

The instrument easily adjusts while strings are up to tension, and I don't have to cut a hole in the brace inside the body.

Another unique quality of your instruments is that you finish the inside of the body. That is a somewhat controversial approach. Can you explain why you do it?

Guitars can be subject to some pretty radical changes in humidity, ranging from all-night sessions at the summer festival on a rainy weekend to desert dryness in the winter in New England. Finish on the inside slows down the migration of moisture in and out of the wood. As for the idea that it ruins tone, I would say two things: there's all that finish on the outside, why would a little on the inside make a difference? And two, try one of my guitars!

A few years back I brought you two of my custom made dreadnaughts for some possible adjustments on the bracing. One was Brazilian/ Adirondack the other quilted mahogany/artist grade German spruce. Both are beautifully crafted by nationally recognized builders, and deservedly so, but I found both lacking in power and projection, particularly in the performance context of the bluegrass band I played in which included two mandolins and a very loud banjo (okay, so all banjo's are loud banjo's). You had some interesting observations and ideas about the shortcomings of these two guitars which led to the dreadnaught you built for me. Can you tell us about your observations over the years of some of the dreadnaughts you've worked on?

I feel that many are nice, sweet sounding instruments but are kind of flubby in the bass. They can be too boomy with thin nasal trebles, and lack projection. These were some of the characteristics the two guitars you brought in exhibited. They are made to sound good to the player, at the expense of strong projection at the front of the guitar. Now I want to be clear, I don't think this is typical of dreadnaughts but these to me are the worst characteristics they can have. My solution, which I did on your guitars and have done on a number of guitars, is to add wood to the braces, usually near the ends, where they're often cut down too much. This can improve power and projection tremendously. Kind of the opposite if the usual practice of shaving braces! (Of course, over built guitars can certainly benefit from shaving the braces).

What about bracing, bracing patterns, shaping, etc.?

I select pieces for the bracing of each guitar I am working on based on the top wood and what I am trying to achieve. I try to balance the top and braces. For instance, if I have a top that's a bit "loose," I'll look for some brace stock that's very light and stiff, or if I have a top that's very light and stiff, I'll look for braces that are a bit softer. They're all within a certain pretty narrow range. I'm looking for how flexible they are, how they feel when I pick them up and when I rub them, and how they sound when I drop then on the floor! They have to meet my standards regardless of what kind of spruce they are, and I reject a lot of them.

My bracing patterns are pretty conventional. The X on my dreadnaughts is opened a bit wider than usual, I think. My bridges are a bit longer than is common, and my bridge plates a bit larger.

I often leave the X brace straight or nearly so, and shave the braces if necessary after I've strung it up.

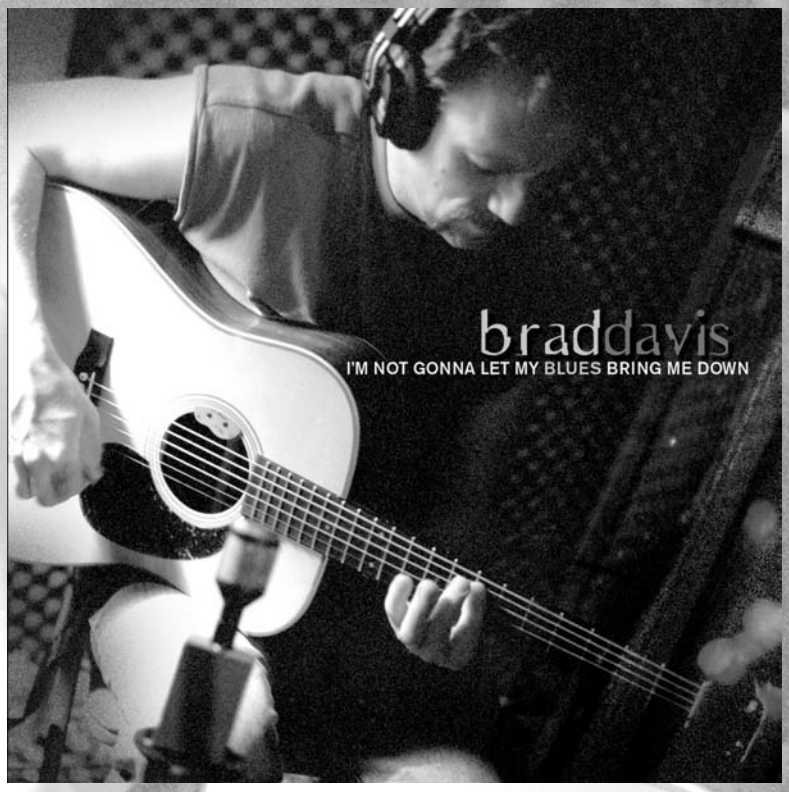
Can you describe or characterize the sound you try to achieve in your guitars?

I want to get volume, or projection, but certainly not volume alone. I am most interested in the character of the sound. In order to achieve the cutting power of other instruments, like the banjo and the mandolin you are likely to find in a blue grass band, I thought about how I braced the guitar. It has to have some substance which is why I have some reservations about too lightly braced instruments. With bracing I attempt to use the mass of the body to help produce the sound. It would be easier to draw a picture than to describe it in words. Some years back, I worked on a couple of Mossman guitars that I liked. He seemed to have similar ideas about stiff backs that helped to project. There is some risk you can lose a little depth in the bass of the Dreadnought but stiffer backs reduce the amount of unmusical high overtone noise like sizzle or scratch. So I try to achieve rich tone across the spectrum low to high while gaining volume, focus and projection.

Finally, can you give us some idea of the turn around time customers should expect when they order an instrument and a general price range?

Turnaround time is nine months to a year at this point. Prices begin at $2,700 for a non-cutaway FC35 (small flattop). Dreadnaughts are in the $3,000-$3,500 range, depending on woods and appointments.

Brad Nickerson can be contacted at Nickerson Guitars (413) 586-8521.



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You know, with the current resurgence in the popularity of Bluegrass music, a little can go a long way... I'm just being honest. Some of the nasal twang, banjo picking sounds can become a blur. Then, along comes Brad Davis! Brad draws the best from Bluegrass and blends it so well with his very unique technique - including "speed picking", individually memorable lyrics, and then tops it off with support from phenomenal friends - the likes of Billy Bob Thornton and Tommy Shaw of Styx?! *I'm Not Gonna Let My Blues Bring Me Down* by Brad Davis, add it to your library today - you'll wear grooves in it... ~ my picks cut 4 "Big Timber", cut 5 "Tell Me Son", and cut 12 "Sight of Truth"...

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The Solo Flatpicker

by Dan Crary

Crosspicking Part II

Editor's Note: This article is a continuation of last issue's article on Crosspicking. Dan submitted the article as one complete piece, however, I had to divide it in two due to the length of the audio that accompanied this article.

Now, what to do with this technique…. Oh, many things. First, you can learn some of those so-called "Rag" tunes that feature a fiddle shuffle, because this cross-picking technique is an almost perfect flatpicking equivalent of the fiddle shuffle. "Beaumont Rag" is, of course, the classic example: in Ex. 4 there's the first phrase of part "B" of "Beaumont Rag" (notice that it's almost exactly ITM with an alternating fretted note on the third string.)

Secondly, and this is particularly sited to the solo player and situation, you can substitute a measure or two of this cross-picking for a measure or two of rhythm, to break up the Bass-strum-bass-strum tedium of the standard church-lick rhythm. Similarly, a little cross-picking can be a transition from the end of a vocal chorus to the beginning of a guitar break. I'll provide a couple of examples of these applications on the CD.

Third, recall I suggested finding a triad or three note chord and making variations; this suggests a third area of application, which is cross picking part of the melody of a tune. Obviously, since the cross-picking technique is an arpeggio, you can't follow most melodies perfectly, but following a tune imperfectly with a cross-picking lick makes for a nice variation. An example from "Sally Good'n" is found in Ex. 5.

In subsequent columns for you solo flatpickers, we'll expand our look at this very useful technique of cross-picking, and do some more to integrate it into our repertoire of approaches to flatpicking. And again, as you continue teaching yourself to play, you don't have to wait for the columns to appear. Go ahead and go there yourself. Maybe you'll get there before we do. If so, write to me here and let me know what you discovered, and maybe we can pass along some of your discoveries.

In any case, all the best as you continue to teach yourself to play. Remember to do just a little, most days of your life, to improve your playing. A small variation, ten minutes spent on solving a problem, polishing up a rough spot in a tune, all these things can be done in a few minutes and they'll keep you moving and unstuck and interested in tomorrow. I won't mention that that's what practice is, because realizing that it's practice might ruin the fun. No, practice is what you never get around to, so instead of doing that, why not just sit down for a few minutes and fix a little problem, learn a little cross-picking, create a little variation. That wouldn't be practice, of course, oh no. But it would make your playing better and keep you interested in making progress on the guitar. So even though you don't have time to practice, maybe you maybe you can find a few minutes today to do that.

Cheers…

Advanced Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar
with Wyatt Rice

In this 90-minute video, rhythm guitar master Wyatt Rice teaches you how to greatly expand your rhythm guitar abilities by teaching: crosspicking rhythm; syncopated rhythm; a variety of right hand patterns combined with left hand technique to develop a "groove" rhythm; unique bass runs; passing chords; chord substitutions; and chord inversions.

Additionally, Wyatt is shown improvisationally accompanying various instruments (banjo, fiddle, guitar, mandolin) and then analyzing what he has done to provide the rhythmic foundation behind each instrument. Also featured are guest appearances by: Rickie Simpkins on fiddle (Sally Goodin' and Dusty Miller) and mandolin (Big Country and I Wonder Where You Are Tonight), Sammy Shelor on banjo (Ground Speed and Whitewater), Kenny Smith on guitar (Goodbye, Liza Jane and Bill Cheathum) and Tony Rice (Waltz for Indira, Manzanita, and Devlin). Wyatt provides guitar accompaniment to each of these artists and then analyzes the techniques he has employed.

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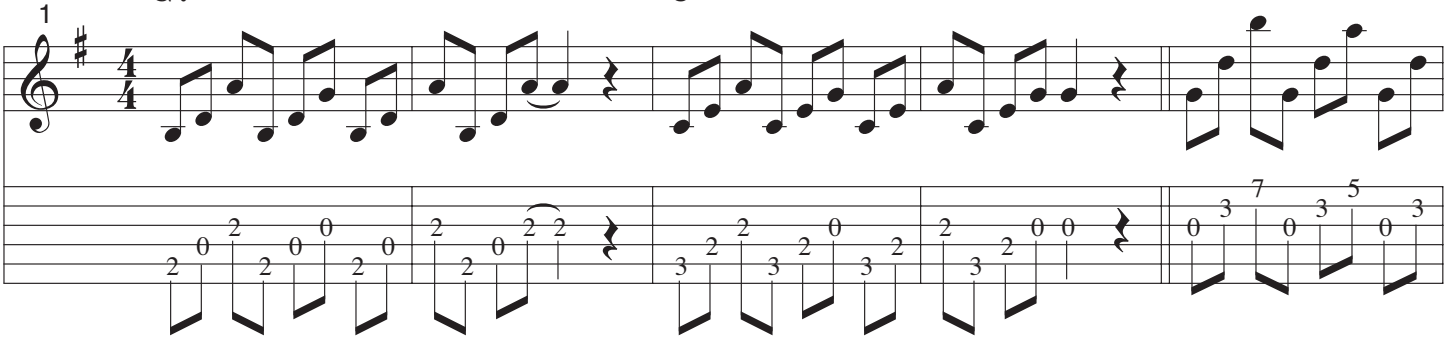
Audio CD
Tracks 34-36

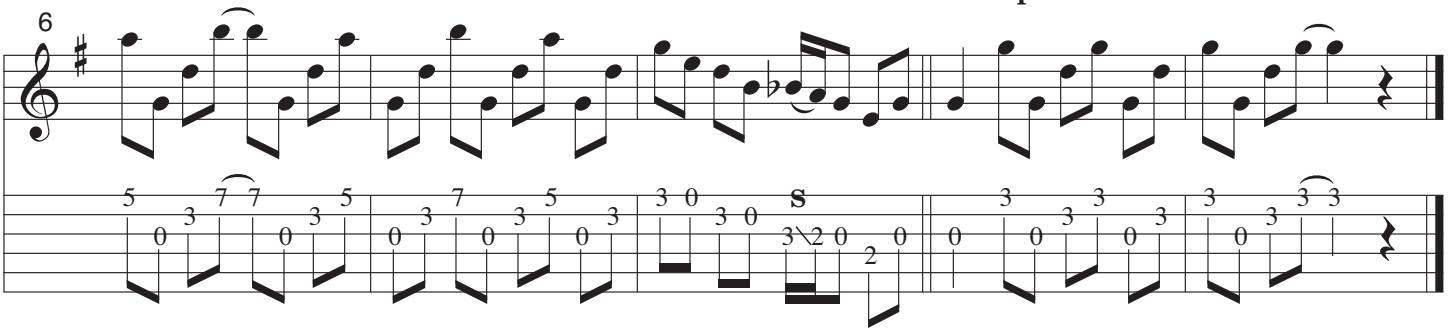
Example 4

G7 **C**



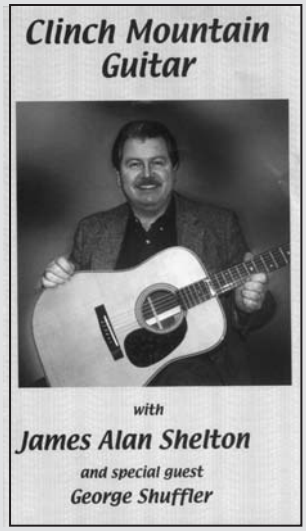
Example 5

Example 6



Clinch Mountain Guitar with James Shelton

In this one-hour instructional video James Alan Shelton and special guest George Shuffler demonstrate and teach the guitar techniques that helped change the role of the guitar in bluegrass music. James and George display their crosspicking talents on "Katy Dear," and "Banks of the Ohio," and George demonstrates his solo to "Will You Miss Me." James interviews George regarding his crosspicking technique and then James teaches "Rank Stranger," "Uncloudy Day," "Bury Me Beneath the Willow," "Wildwood Flower," "Road To Coeburn," and "Tom's Creek." A tab book accompanies the video.



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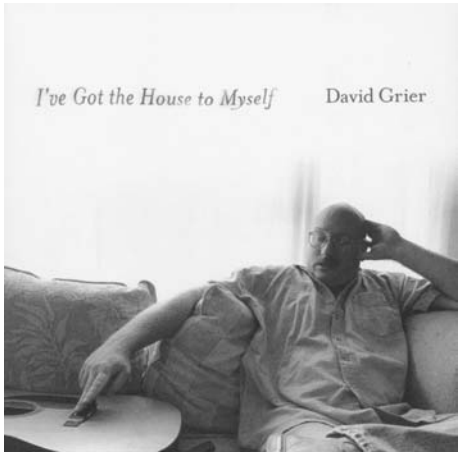
By Request

David Grier's "Black Mountain Rag"

David Grier's newest solo recording *I've Got The House to Myself* is not only one of the most popular, best selling, and highly praised flatpicking recordings to come out in the past few years, it is one of those landmark recordings that sets a standard by which all future flatpicking projects will be measured against.

Since its release we have received numerous requests from readers who are eager to see some transcriptions from the recording. Additionally, a wonderful acoustic guitar magazine published in Japan contacted *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* requesting the use of some of our material for a special flatpicking guitar feature they were preparing. One of the tunes they requested was David Grier's "Black Mountain Rag" from *I've Got the House to Myself*. We'd never featured anything from the recording, so we thought it was about time and I had Brad Davis transcribe David's first solo. We sent the transcription to Japan and we are offering it to our readers here as well.

Enjoy!

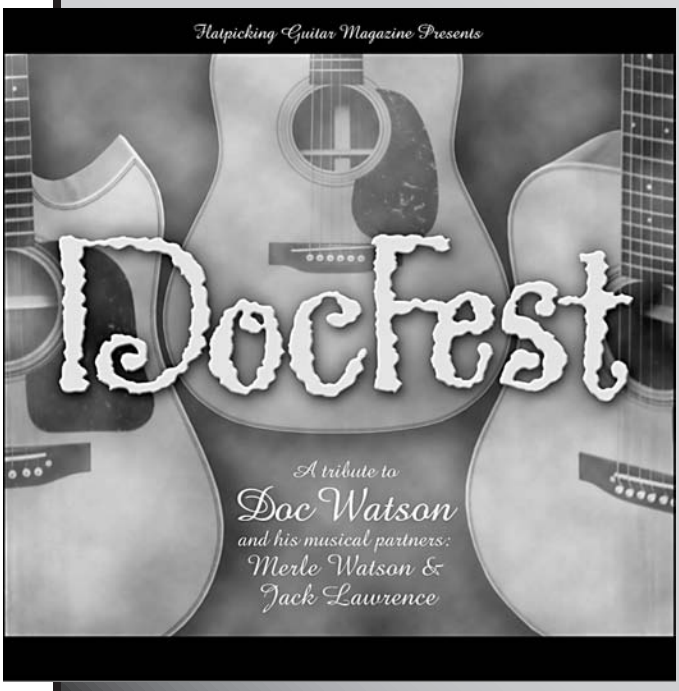


Flatpicking Guitar Magazine pays tribute to

Doc Watson, Merle Watson & Jack Lawrence

with the release of a new musical tribute CD:

This CD includes eighteen tunes by many of today's top flatpickers. Each of the artist on this project were inspired to learn the song that they perform after first hearing the song performed by Doc Watson with one of his musical partners Merle Watson or Jack Lawrence. The CD includes Fourteen Vocals Songs and Four Instrumental Tunes as follows:



Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar (Doug Rorrer & Steve Kilby)
Reuben's Train (Dix Bruce & Jim Nunally)
Old Camp Meeting Time (Kenny & Amanda Smith)
Deep River Blues (Jim Hurst & Missy Raines)
Salt Creek/Bill Cheathum (Wyatt Rice, Tim Stafford & Rushad Eggleston)
Alberta/Billy In The Lowground (Orrin Star & Russell Scholle)
Train That Carried My Girl From Town (Brad Davis & Whitewater)
Way Downtown (John Tindel & RST)
Cotton Eyed Joe (David Grier)
A-Roving On A Winter's Night (Chris & Sally Jones)
The Crawdad Song (Brad Davis & Dan Miller)
Rainbow (Steve Kaufman & Roy Curry)
Little Sadie (Adam Granger)
More Pretty Girls Than One (Craig Vance & Chris Leske)
Black Mountain Rag (Steve Pottier & Barry Soloman)
The Lone Journey (John McGann & Chris Moore)
Southbound (Joe Carr & Alan Munde)
Matty Groves (Larry Keel & Rushad Eggleston)

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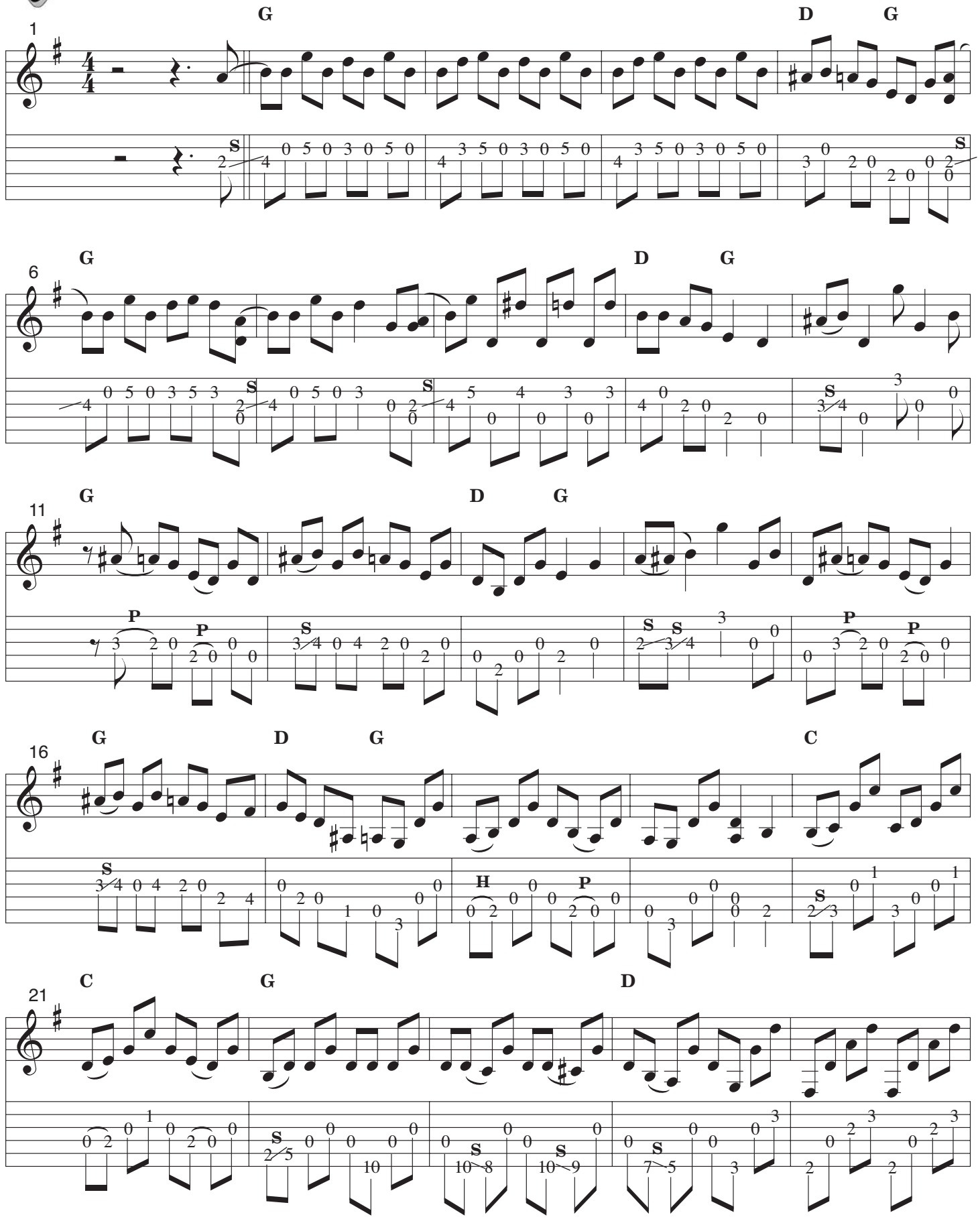
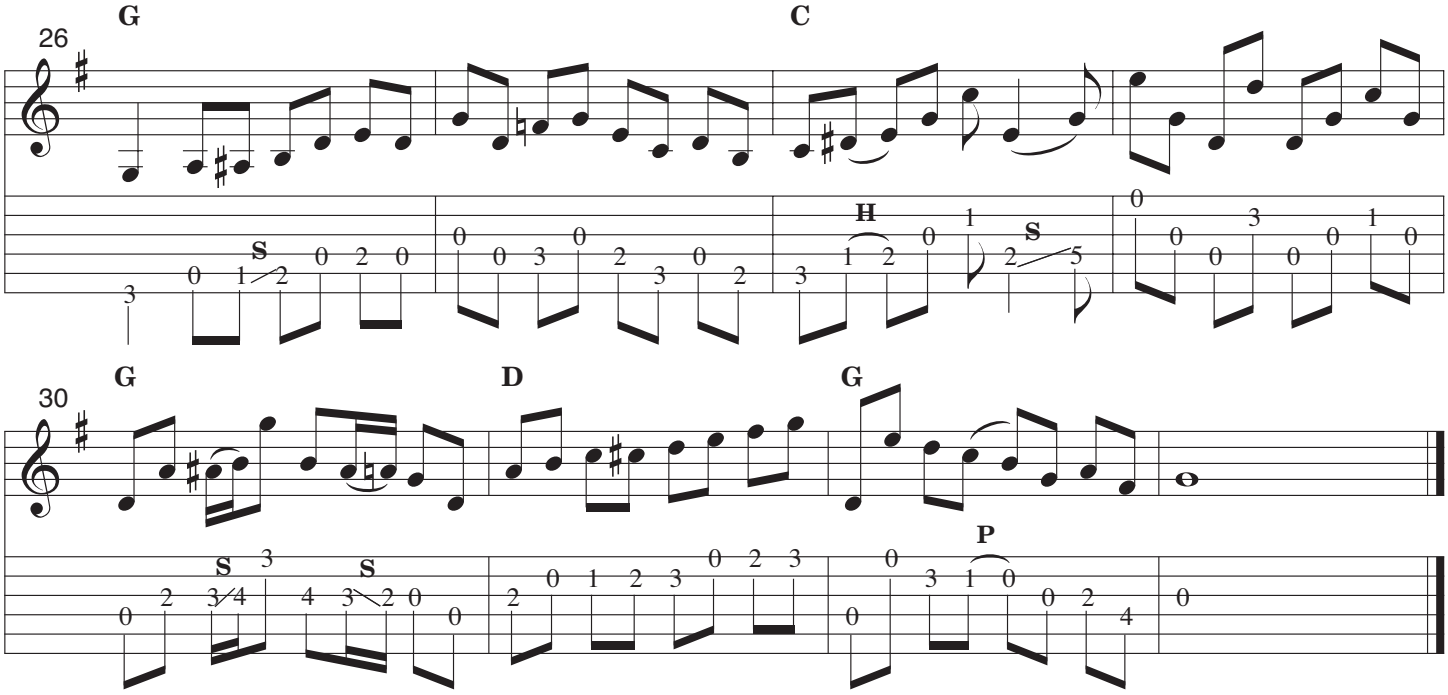
Audio CD
Track 37

Black Mountain Rag

Arranged by David Grier
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Black Mountain Rag (con't)



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Break Time

by Chris Jones

Double-Stops

I want to revisit an old guitar break challenge in this issue: the slow break and how to deal with those empty spaces.

You know the problem. Things are all fine and good when you get that right hand in up-tempo eighth note mode. If you've gotten to where you can play up to speed and you've learned your way around the guitar in a few keys, you can power through a break almost without thinking about it (mind you, the last time I stopped thinking about what I was playing, my "Little Cabin Home on the Hill" break started sounding strangely like "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina"). But what about the slow songs, the kind with a flowing melody and a lot of space between notes? Suddenly a run of eighth notes sounds silly, but the quarter notes sound too sparse and are harder to play in time.

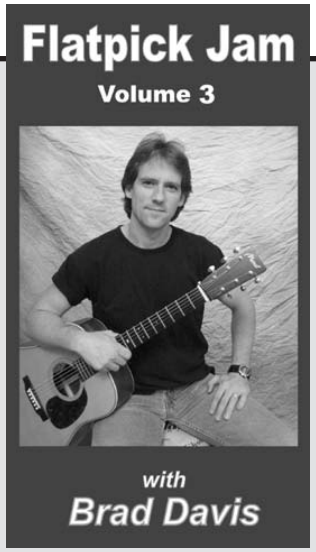
There are numerous ways to handle this sort of break, besides the cop-out of simply refusing to play one. (Note: Try to avoid the passive-aggressive technique of playing nothing for 4 bars, then looking up as if to say "It's not my break, is it?" This leads to resentment and irritation.). In past issues I've discussed double-stops or crosspicking, but this time I'd like to teach a break that uses both extensively.

"Double-stop" is fiddle language for sounding two notes on two strings simultaneously (some people can sound two notes on one string, but it requires time travel and an out-of-body experience, techniques I have no training in). On the guitar this frequently means playing out of a partial chord position. It so happens that this is also what you do when you crosspick, so one can naturally flow into the other.

I've tabbed out a fairly simple break, but it's one that may give you some tools that can apply to other slow songs. The tune is "Don't Cheat In Our Hometown," which is not only sound relationship advice, but is also a great bluegrass song originally recorded by Keith Whitley and Ricky Skaggs in the early 70s (on the LP *Second Generation*). The late Keith Whitley is known for his singing which influenced many a bluegrass and country singer, but he also was a very solid Shuffler-style lead guitar player when he was playing in Ralph Stanley's band. What follows is Keith's break almost exactly as it was recorded. (I say "almost" because I have this song on LP and I need a new cartridge for my turntable.) It's short and to the point, more like a long turnaround. Ricky apparently liked the break too, because years later he did a country remake of the song and right in the middle of it was this same break, virtually note-for-note (his turntable also needed a cartridge).

I decided to play two versions of it to emphasize the importance of the double-stops. Version #1 contains only single notes, and it's a good idea to play this first to really get the timing of the quarter notes down. The tendency to rush these can be overwhelming to a flatpicker. Then you can move on to the crosspicking section. I recommend the George Shuffler down-down-up roll for this to give it the right sound. The little hammer-on embellishment in the next-to-last measure is quick and subtle, but really adds a lot.

If you feel comfortable with that, play Version #2, which has all of the quarter notes after the initial pick-up notes changed to double stops. In the second measure you'll be playing out of partial formations of an F chord, then in the third measure you'll play off a C chord. Remember that the same quarter note timing issues remain, but now you also need to make sure to pick all the double stops cleanly and with authority, so the two notes really sound together. As always, all these quarter notes and hammer-on eighth notes should be downstrokes.



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Don't Cheat In Our Hometown

Arranged by Chris Jones

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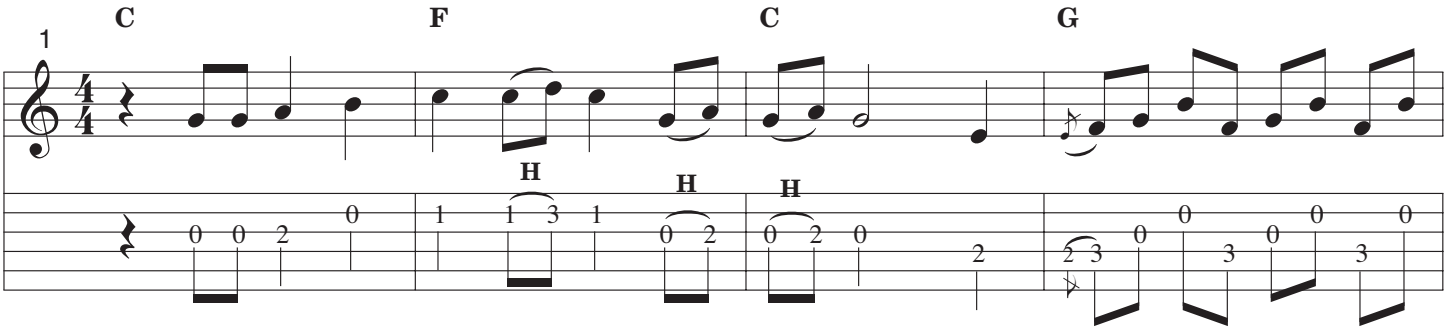
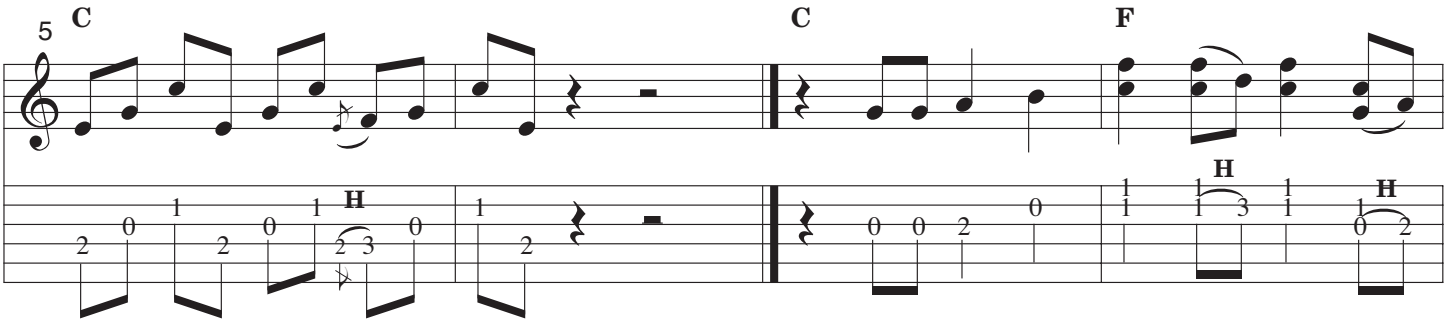
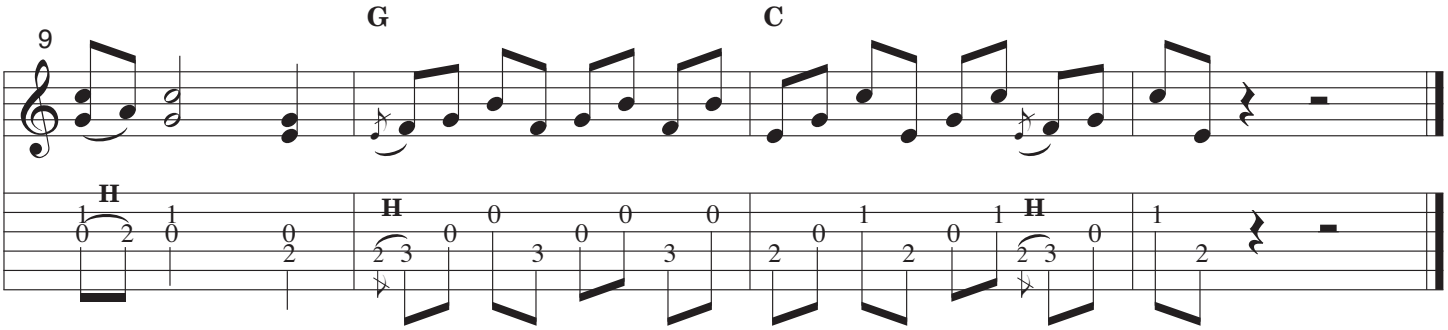


Variation 2





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Gypsy Jazz Guitar

by Paul Mehling

Ever break a string? Duh. It's a drag and usually happens when you're really flowing, which can break your concentration and cause extreme aggravation, etc. Let's look at options to change the disappointment of the broken string into an opportunity to expand your Gypsy guitar vocabulary (and thus out your inner Gypsy).

First, make sure you're not using an inferior brand of string. If you've invested the bucks in a Selmer copy (or a real Selmer!), your guitar deserves the finest strings. Personally, I'm very cheap and hate to spend money on something that is ultimately destined to go dead or break. But in the meantime you want to make the most beautiful tone possible. With the suppleness of the correct strings you'll find your ability to get more expression out of each note increases enormously! Let's say you went to someone for lessons and paid them maximum dollars to tell you how to improve your playing as quickly and effortlessly as you can (that's how most guitarists are!). Your teacher tells you to use better strings! This is advice worth paying for, but you're getting it here for the price of this fine publication. So try the strings that most all of the guys you listen are using: Argentine Strings by Saverez, if you can't get 'em, try Dell'Arte Strings from the guitar building folks of the same name. Tell em Pazzo sent you! Who knows—it might get you an autographed picture of a guitar or something!

Once you have purchased your new strings and have put one (or all of them) on your guitar, try the following exercise: at a medium tempo (metronome 110), play some quarter notes with the open string, then when you have a nice comfortable STEADY rhythm going try fretting one note with the first finger (Ex 1):

When you have that under control (it won't take long, but take your time nonetheless) try the same thing with the second finger.

So far so good? Okay, now let's try a simple G major scale, using the open G string as a pedal point between each degree of the scale (this may sound like theory, but in fact it's a Django lick and used by other musicians as well) (Ex 2).

Notice that I'm having you set the rhythm up with one bar of open G. This is to get you to feel the groove so that you can keep that rhythm going throughout the scale. If you're having any difficulty with this, slow the tempo down to something manageable. Don't proceed until you can totally and perfectly nail each exercise! As you get the control and groove in your playing, then gradually increase speed. If it gets too sloppy or out of control set the metronome back a notch. It's not punishment and there's no ego reward for speeding through this (or any) technique builder. Once you've got this wired, try the next example. It's the same thing but with fewer open strings and more fretted notes. (Ex 3.)

Of course you know that you can and should apply your creative powers here and try playing this going up (ascending) the neck as well as going down (descending) the neck. You can use all the different fingers on the left hand, one at a time or all in sequence as usual. And you can try it on all strings! That's where the broken string thing comes into play: this is an excellent way to break in a newly replaced string. When you first put a new string on it needs to stretch and settle into the instrument. Doing this exercise a few times will get that string up to speed in no time and your hands will be the more coordinated, warmed up and rarin' to go.

The Guitar Educators Advisory Board (GEAD) has sited me for a decided lack of comedic value in my columns here during the past year, so I'm obliged to include the following bit of cleverness to help improve my standing in certain literary circles. So please feel free to snicker or laugh openly as you execute Ex 4 & Ex 5.

The last exercise is again taken as a lick from M. Reinhardt. It's accomplished using two fingers this time, but still using the open string as a pedal point. Try it with the first and second fingers, of course, but you may want to challenge your hand by using the second and third fingers and/or third and fourth, etc. Also note that you can play these exercises as written or as triplets. Either way they add some speed and swing to your playing (Ex 6).

Good luck, have fun, and email me (pazzo@hcsf.com) if you have questions!

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Mehling Exercises

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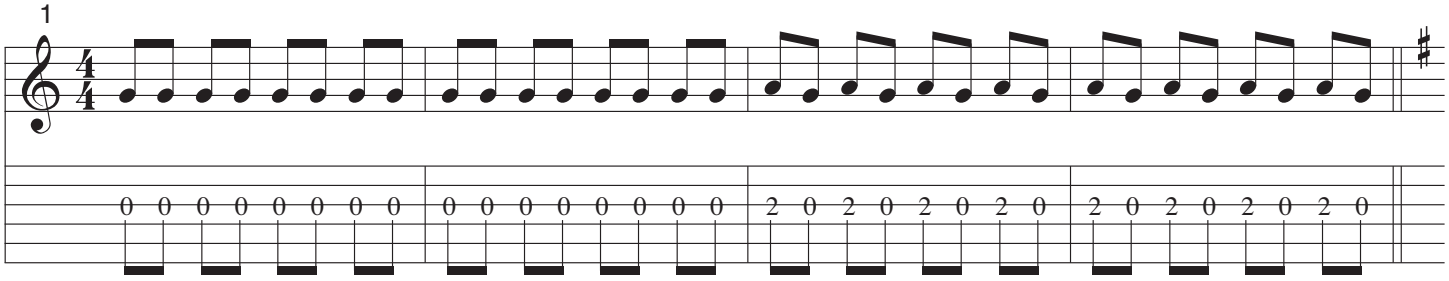
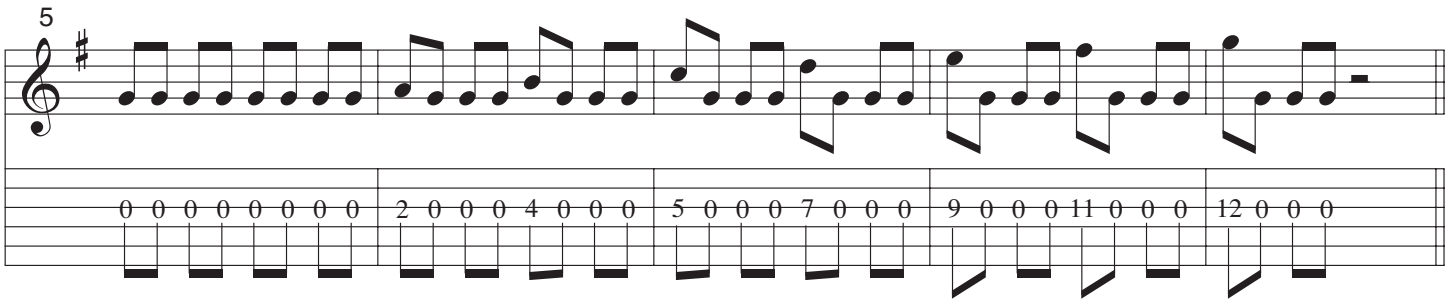
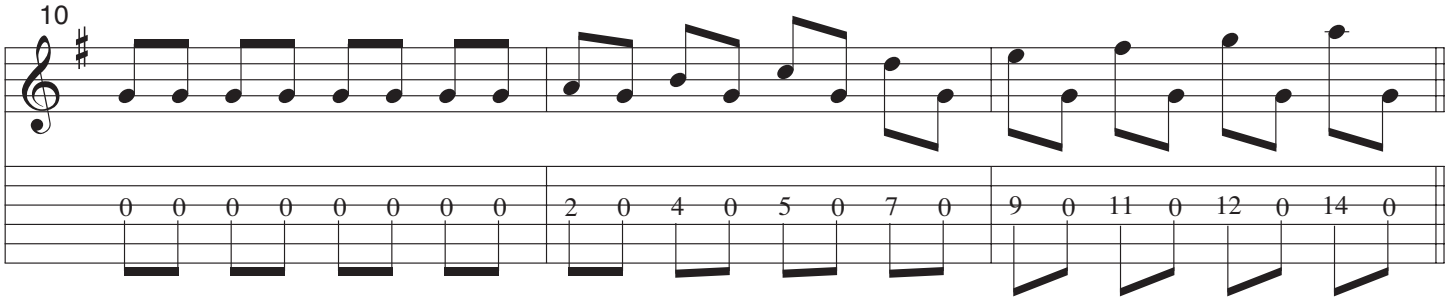


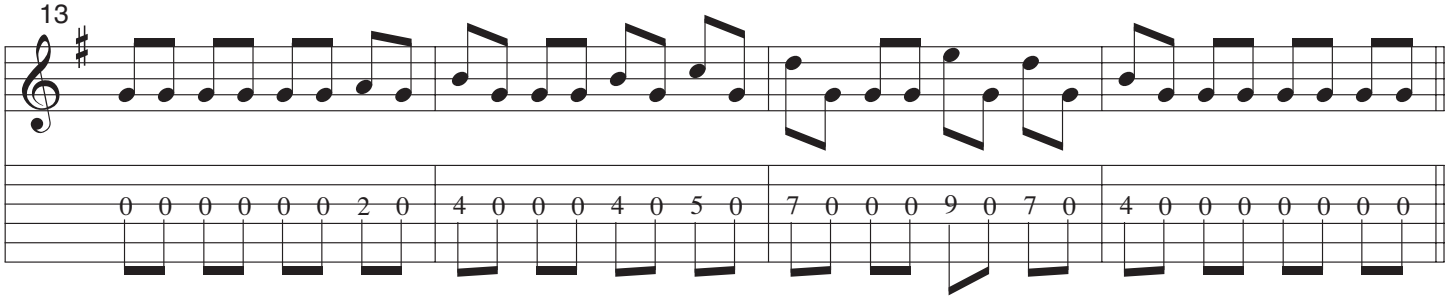
Exercise 2



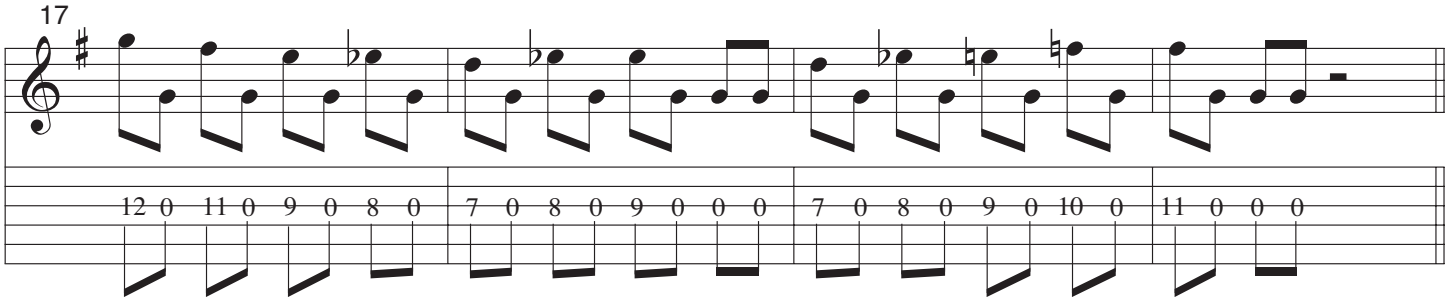
Exercise 3



Exercise 4

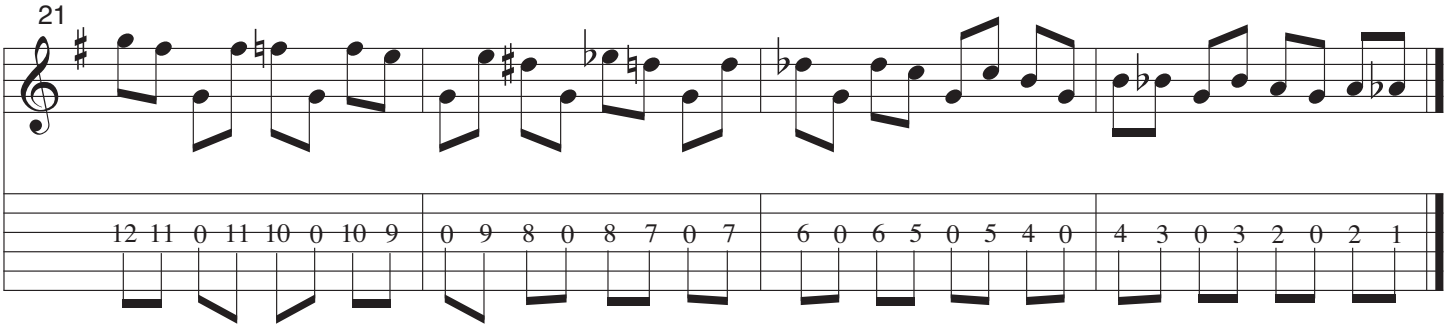


Exercise 5



Mehling Exercises (con't)

Exercise 6



Merlefest 2003: The Doc Watson Guitar Championship

by Chris Thiessen

Talk about sensory overload! This was my first year attending Merlefest, and after reviewing the program I knew I was in serious trouble. There's entirely too much to see at any one time.

But the one event I was determined to attend was the flatpicking guitar competition (aka The Doc Watson Guitar Championship). At 3PM on Friday I was in the second row, close enough to see the beads of sweat on the brow of each of the 19 contestants. And sweat they did (except for the 9-year-old contestant, who at one point blithely stared out the window while playing). As a Merlefest newbie, I can't say whether this year's crop of hopeful champions was representative of the typical contestants, but they all impressed me with the simple courage of stepping onto that small stage before 100+ eager listeners and playing through their selections. A teen-aged contestant hesitated briefly in the middle of one of his tunes, but quickly recovered and finished solidly. That was impressive grace under fire.

In the finals, though, three guitarists—Brandon Davis, Steve Lewis, and Tony Witt—remained to play two more tunes. Steve Lewis (from Todd, NC, who finished second in the 2001 and 2002 guitar competitions and first in the 2001 and 2002 banjo competitions) walked away with first place and the Gallagher. Brandon David (Independence, VA) won second place and the Taylor, and Tony Witt (Johnson City, TN) was third, receiving a Calton case.

I ran into Steve later in the festival, congratulated him, and asked whether he had actually prepared four tunes. "Nope," he grinned. "I only had two, and had to come up with two more at the last minute. I was losing steam rapidly at the end." Still, an amazing performance!

Although the majority of the contestants played familiar standards, several played original tunes. I corralled one of the competition judges, FGM columnist Brad Davis (who was performing at Merlefest with the Sam Bush Band), and asked him whether playing original tunes helps or hinders a contestant.

"Well, they're not familiar," Brad told me, "so a judge doesn't have a measurement standard" [as they would with "Sally Goodin" or "Soldier's Joy"]. "Also, a judge can't tell whether the competitor is doing an original tune justice." As a judge, Brad primarily listens for "control, dynamics and tone. Play your piece at a moderate tempo, with patience and confidence." But he cautioned "if you don't know a song well, don't think it will carry you to the finish."

Most contestants had a guitar accompaniment, but several used a bass or banjo. I asked Brad about that as well. He suggested using a mandolin or banjo, which allows the guitar's voice to stand out.

So, armed with that knowledge, am I bold enough to even think about stepping on that stage next year? Well, maybe, and maybe not. One of the things I noted about the audience was its support: I felt everyone wanted each of the contestants to do well. And in that kind of competition, everyone goes home a winner of one kind or another. Now maybe if they gave each contestant a commemorative "I Survived the 2004 Doc Watson Guitar Competition" sweatshirt…

THE O-ZONE

by Orrin Star

Star of the County Down

Though it has great words, this poignant Irish waltz-time ballad has enough going for it musically that it is frequently played as an instrumental.

I love this tune. Having played it briefly on my *Rhythm Workshop* video (to demonstate the melody) I've have gotten several emails (from otherwise happy video purchasers) requesting a tab of my lead. This one's for you, boys.

This arrangment of "Star of the Country Down" again finds us in Normanville* stylistically speaking: a self-contained solo rendition that makes liberal use of strums to help communicate the melody.

Specfically speaking, three different kinds of strums are deployed here:

i) 'regular' strums

ii) 'timing' strums (much softer than regular strums; surrounded by parentheses in the tab).

iii) 'rakes' or 'pushes' (not really true strums at all, but group rest strokes, done quickly, with a stiff wrist. A way cool way to accent certain notes and chords; indicated by a > over a group of notes).

There are also several instances here in which chords are being modified AS they being strummed; the second measure of each pair of Em measures, for example, features a treble run on three successive down strums.

I also play a number of consecutive eigth notes with consecutive 'down' strokes—a departure from the 'normal' down-up algorithm. This is a powerful option (for both lead and rhythm playing) on slower 3/4-time songs. (All of these instances are indicated in the tab.)

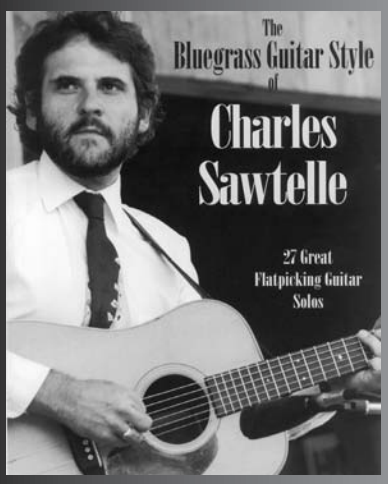
So pay particular attention to the tab on this one.

Like "Hard Times Come Again No More" in my last column, this arrangement of "Star of the County Down" is deceptively simple: though it is played exclusively in first position and has no real left hand surprises, considerable right hand finesse is required to get the various kinds of strums to flow together and sound right.

Good luck with it.

*-Norman Blake's whimsical hometown

'Brooklyn Bluegrass Maestro' Orrin Star is an award-winning guitar, banjo and mandolin player. The 1976 National Flatpicking Champion, he has toured and recorded widely, appeared on A Prairie Home Companion and is the author of "Hot Licks for Bluegrass Guitar". See www.flatpick.com/ostar.



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Star of the County Down

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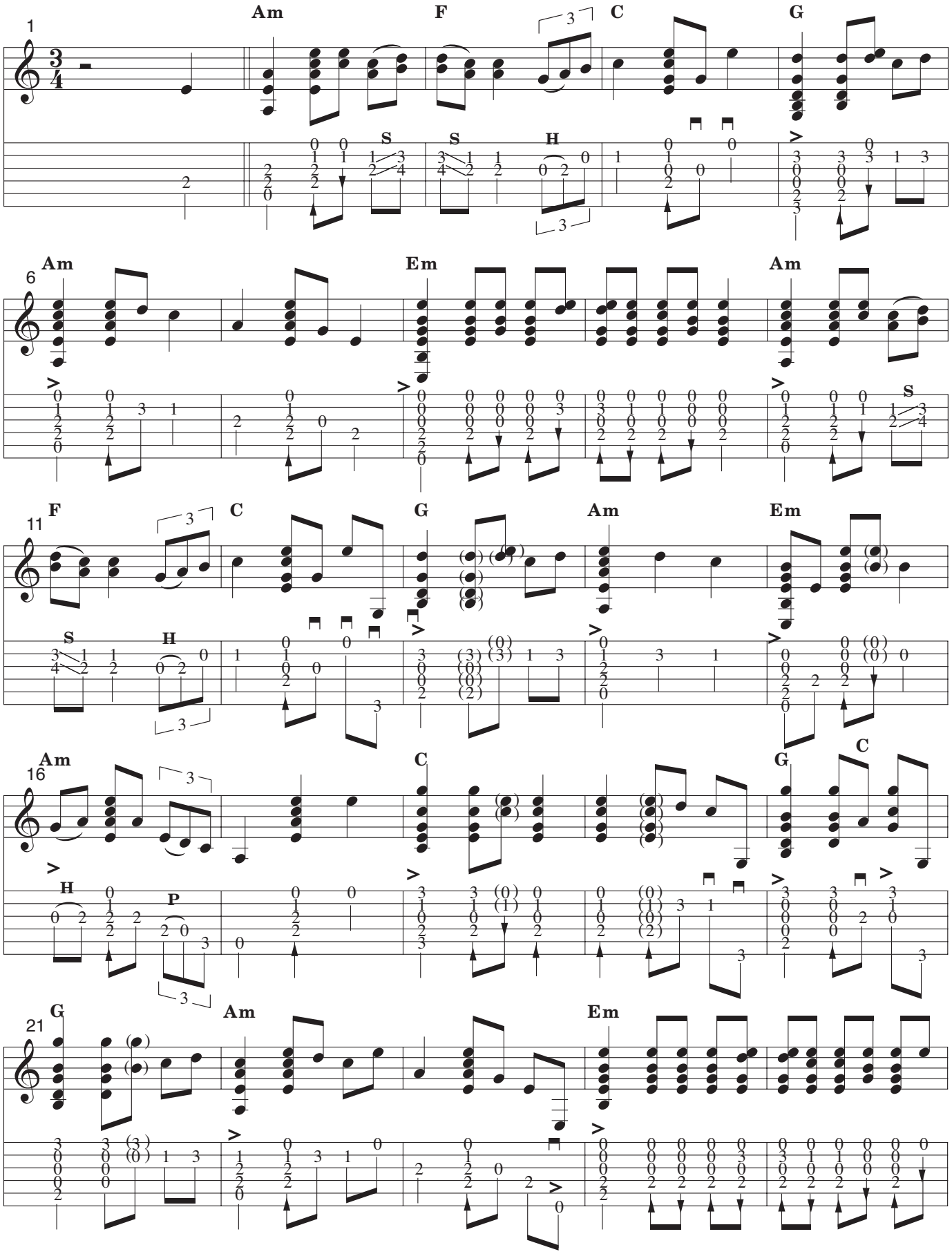
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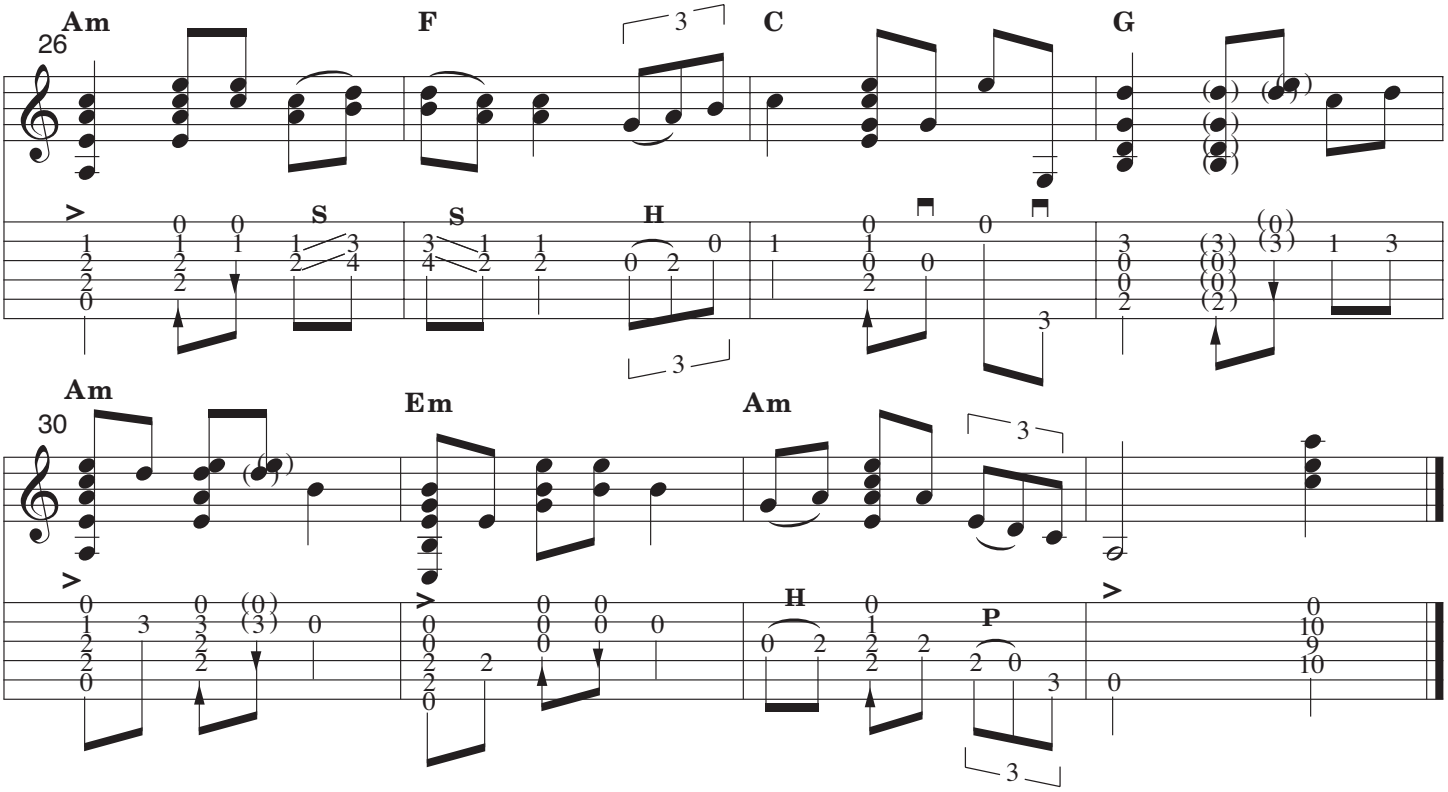
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Music Theory:
Mastering the Fingerboard
Technical Studies for Flatpickers

by Michel A. Maddux

Montrose, Colorado

Just returned from a fun weekend of pickin' and music in Montrose, Colorado. Montrose is a beautiful small town on the western slope of the rockies, surrounded by fairly high mountain peaks, and good farmland. Montrose was so friendly and such a nice place that I was tempted to just stay there. As always, it was a real treat to meet and chat with new friends, flatpickers, and pickerettes!

The folks that came to the Saturday afternoon flatpick workshop in the pavilion were interested in learning more about rhythm playing, and moving up the neck.

One point that I stressed to the folks, and that I will share with you today, is about goal setting.

Goals are important! Goals help motivate us, help us see progress, and help us improve in all parts of life. You can always tell someone who is goal oriented, because they are "on a mission." I set short term, and long term goals... including 5 and 10 year goals. Then I set little goals that keep me on the path to the 5 and 10 year objectives.

Setting the Right Goals!

Every time I pick up the guitar, I try to have a goal set, that is, to think about something that I can master, improve, or learn, each day. What are your goals this week? How about, making that chord change from G to F in "Wheel Hoss," smoother. What about working to play a new version of the G run? Or maybe, this week you are studying tunes in the key of D, drop D tuning. So, you goal might be to keep that drone string ringing while you play the melody on top. Whatever it is, to grow, you must set a goal, and work to achieve it. Your 5 and 10 year goals can be really high, like to be the lead guitarist with the Seldom Scene, win at Winfield, or have your own act. Don't make short term goals too big, or you will get frustrated.

Remember the steps to the top of a pyramid are fairly small, but when you put them all together over time you stand above the crowd!

The Exercises

In this issue, we will take a look at exercises that work in several different positions, hence, keys, and that not only help you advance your technique, but provide some interesting connecting runs that you can use in improvisation, and to change the melody just a little bit. You might be asking yourself "why should I practice these exercises?" There are two main reasons:

- o to improve your technique
- o to learn to play in alternate positions

There is no single thing that will take you to the top of the pyramid, rather, a series of steps that we each must climb.

The Exercise:

This exercise I call "bouncing the strings", because you really focus on playing between two strings at a time. This is a great little exercise, because it gives you a chance to focus on tone and timing, while letting your fingers do the talking! Take the repeat back to the beginning at least four times, and make certain that you can play the ending at the same tempo. Move it up to other scale forms, and stay with the metronome to make it smooth. Just start it on the root of the scale for the other forms, and play the exercise the same way. Notice that this exercise uses the major and minor third that we discussed in the last column.

Be certain to accent the first of each group of four notes to keep the timing solid.

For the top half of exercise 2, in 7th position, flatten the index finger across the strings. Note also that exercise 2 is a closed form, so practice it in all available keys, especially D, E, F, G and A.

About the Tune!

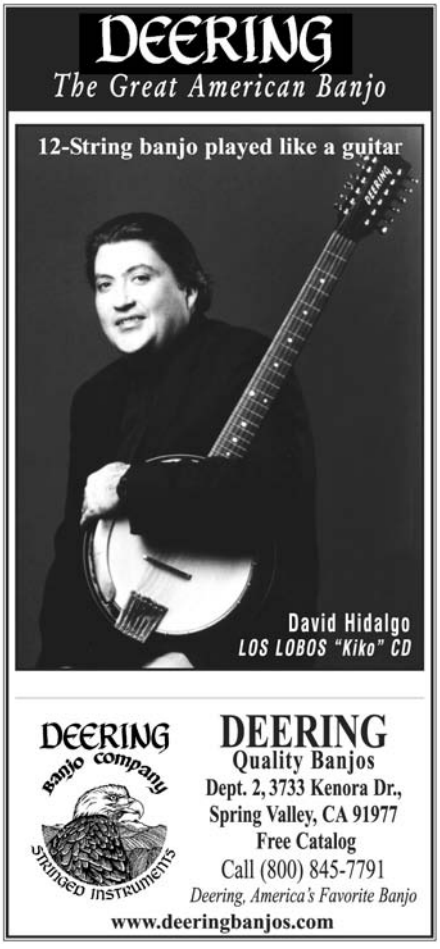
"Bayne Water" is an interesting tune that moves between the major and minor. My arrangement uses combinations of playing the minor third like we do in the exercise, and the open string - floaty - form of the Am. Watch the octave skip from third string E to the open E.

Have fun, and keep on pickin'!

About the Author:

Mike lives in Woodland Park, Colorado, where he plays bluegrass and jazz, writes, teaches, and studies music.
Watch for his band, the "Bertye Maddux Band", coming soon to a festival near you.

You can visit his web site at http://home.rmi.net/~madflatpicker01/index.html The band schedule, sound bytes, photo's, and email addresses are found there. Drop him a line with questions or comments via email, or c/o this magazine.



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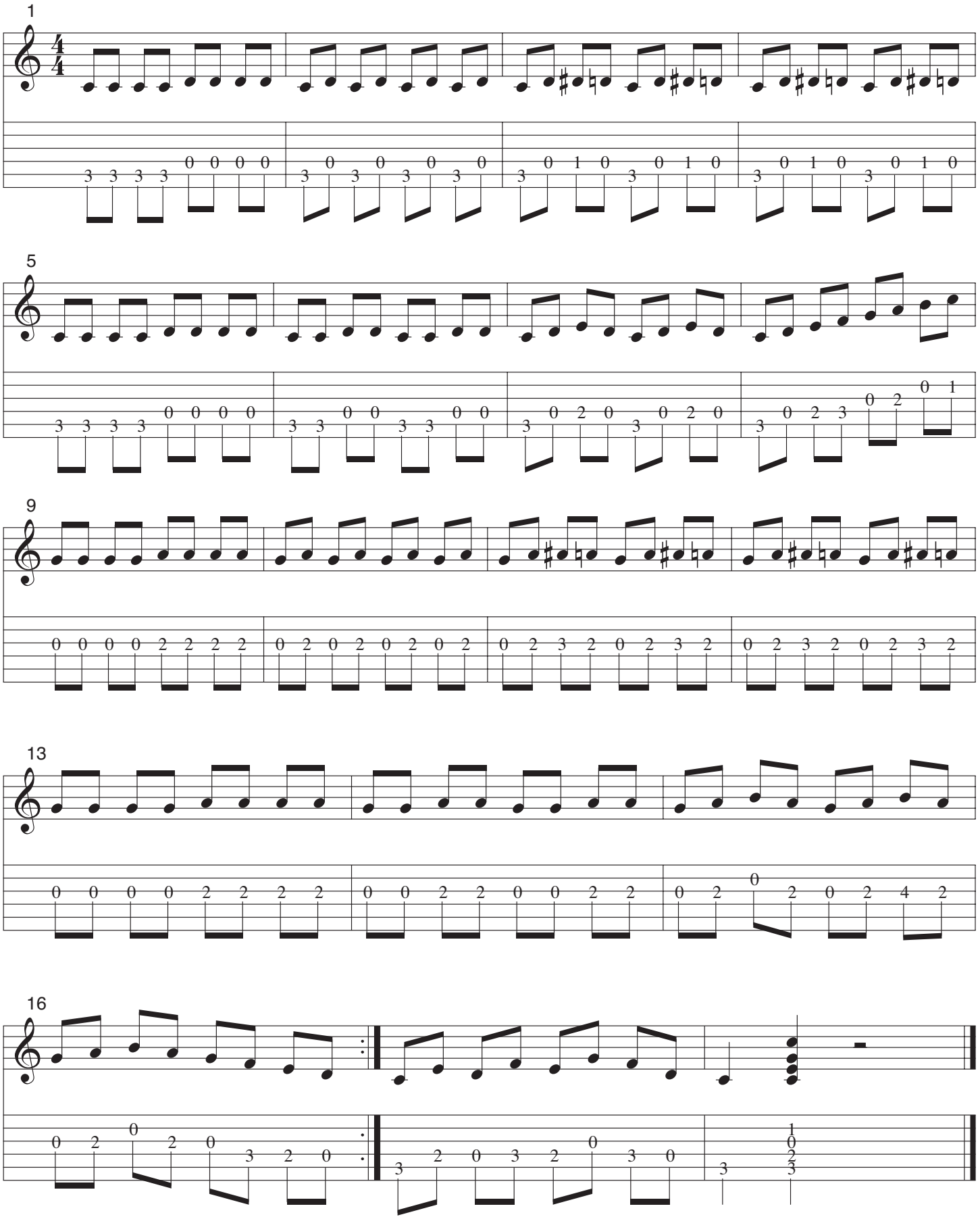
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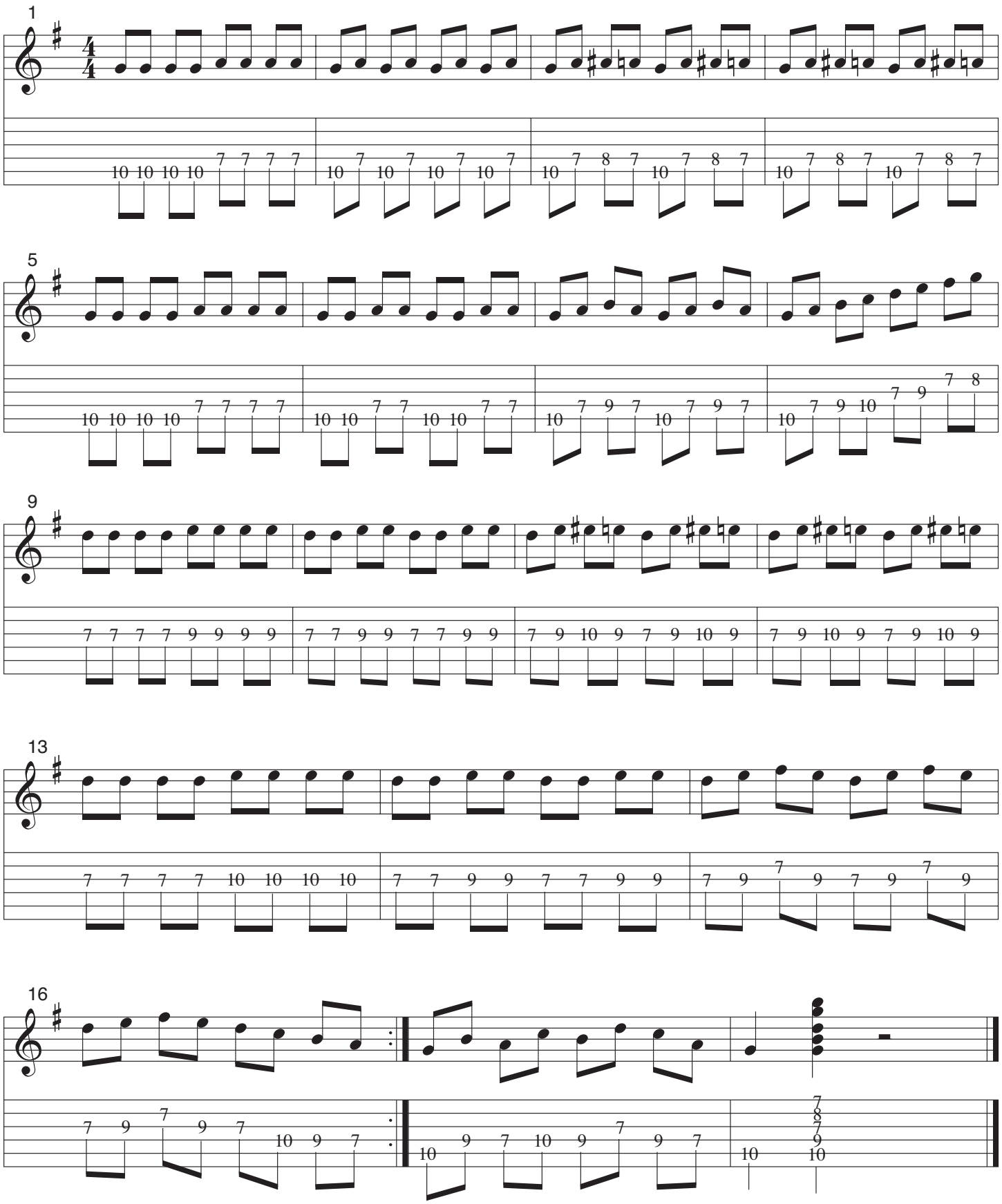
Bouncing the Strings Exercise - Key of G

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Bayne Water

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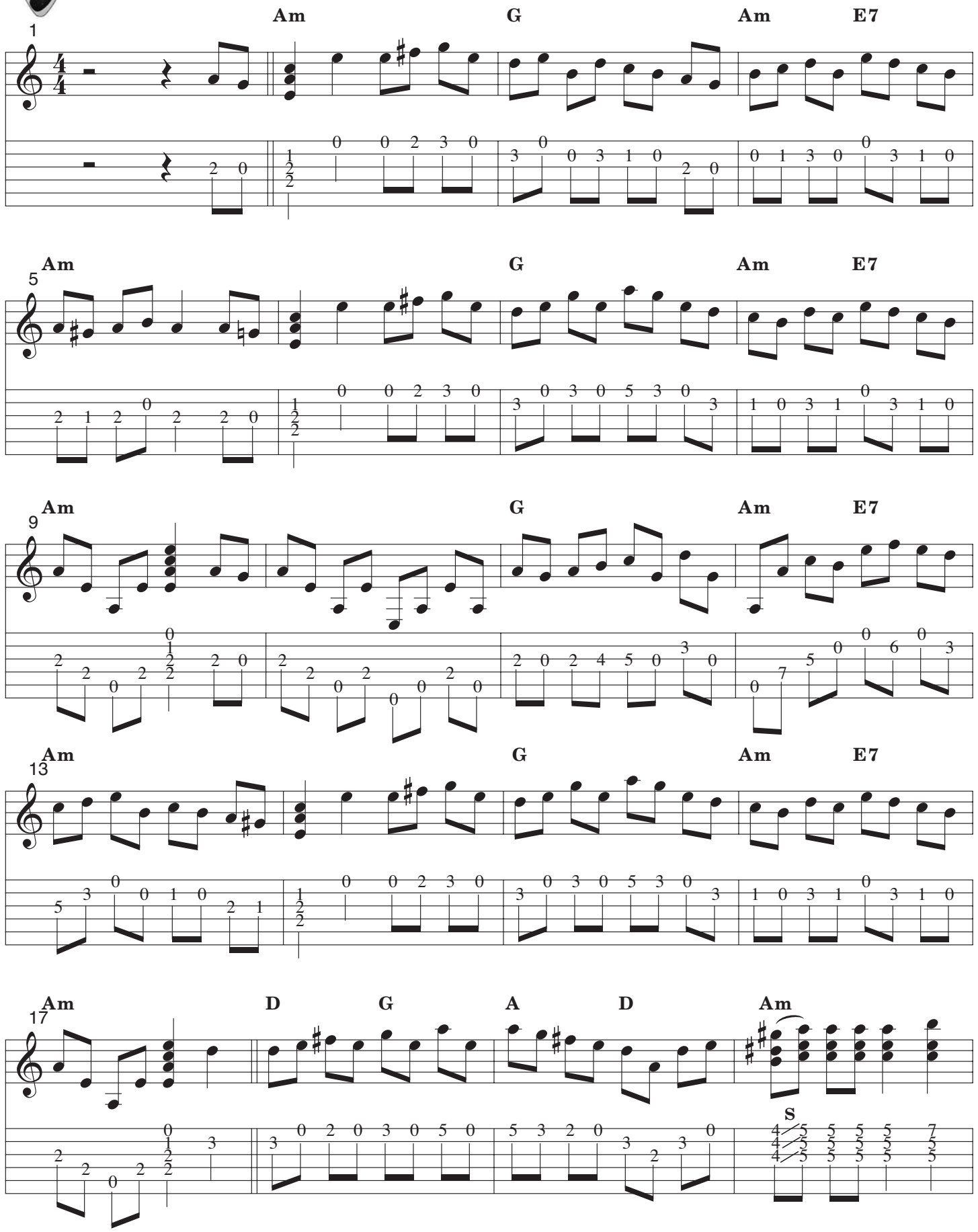
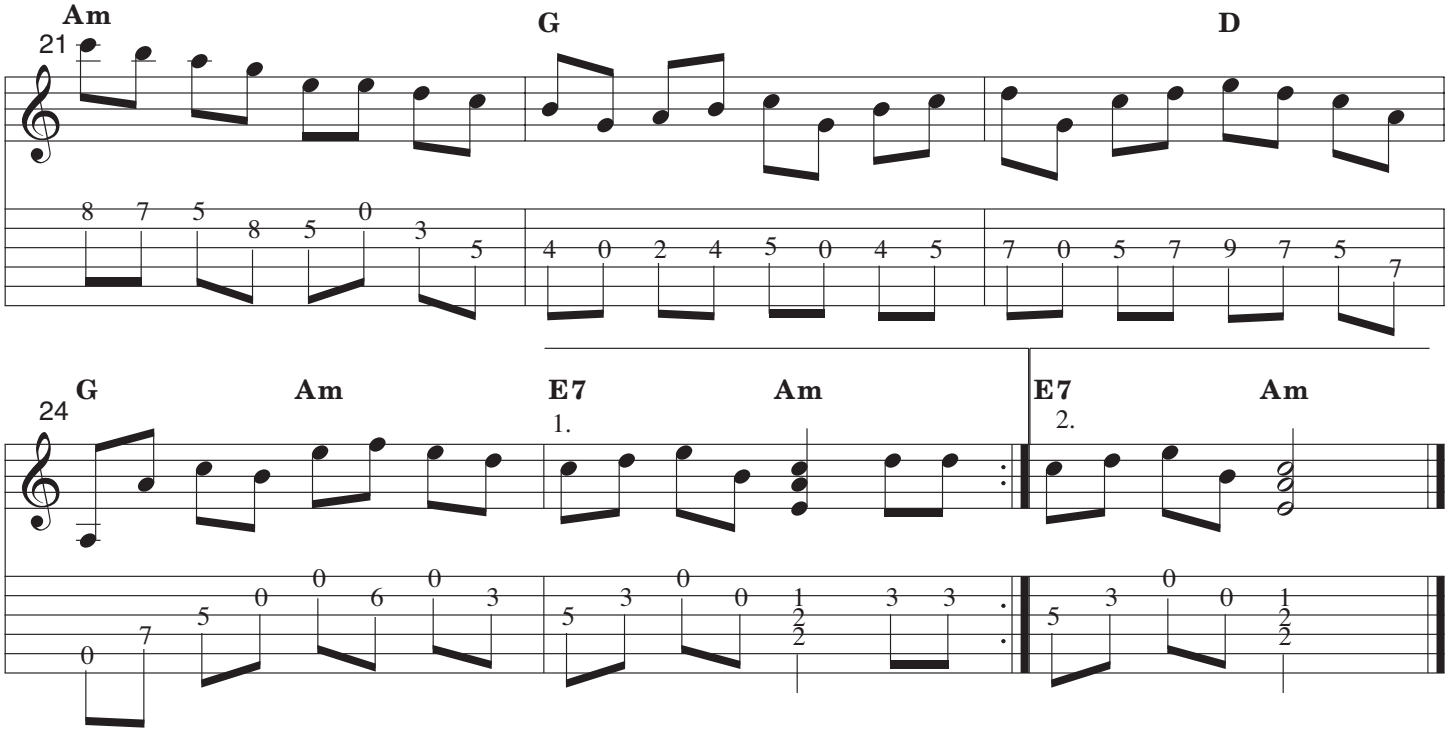

Bayne Water (con't)



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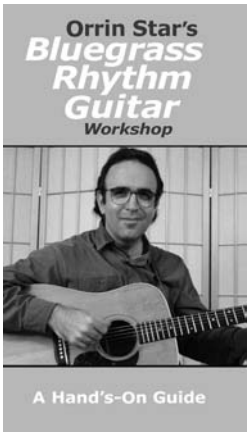
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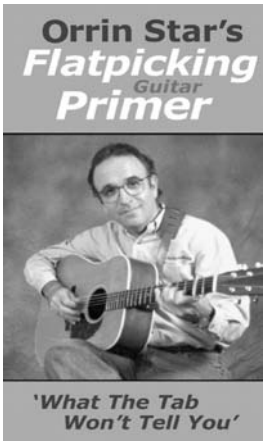

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Wayfaring Stranger

"Wayfaring Stranger" has appeared in *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* before, first in Dix Bruce's column, and later in Dan Huckabee's column. It's such a beautifully written gospel piece, however, not only lyrically but musically, that I wanted to also present it in this column. Mind you, it's not because I think I can do a better job of arranging it—that's far from the case—but simply because it's been such a favorite of mine for a long time.

After recently hearing another beautiful arrangement of the tune by Buddy Greene, the very talented harmonica player, I began experimenting with the piece again. The chord progression in Buddy's arrangement differs from the original somewhat, due to a few jazz-oriented chord changes mixed in here and there, and if you haven't heard it, it's included on his *Simple Praise* CD. It's a must-have album for anyone who loves to listen to gospel music presented at its best.

"Wayfaring Stranger" goes back a ways. No one is exactly sure of the date it was first published, but it was sometime around 1858. Long before that, though, it was an Appalachian folk song. One of the first recordings was by Burl Ives. In my opinion, though, one of the best recordings (in addition to Mr. Greene's that is) was by Emmy Lou Harris on her 1980 *Roses in the Snow* album. Small differences in lyrics have evolved over the years, and the ones included here are from Emmy Lou Harris' recording.

My attempts at capturing some of the feeling evoked in Buddy's recording led to the setting you see here; the key of G minor in G minor tuning. G minor requires retuning four strings, something you may not always wish to do unless you have an extra guitar handy. If you give it a try, however, I think you'll be pleased with the variety of sounds and textures the tuning has to offer, not to mention lots of sustain, all in return for far less left-hand involvement than would be required if attaining those same sounds in standard tuning were the goal.

Beginning with standard tuning, here are the tuning steps: 1) Lower your first string a whole step from E to D. The first and fourth strings open should now be an octave apart. 2) Lower your second string a half step from B to Bb. Compare the second string 4th fret to first string open: they should sound the same. 3) Lower your fifth string a whole step from A to G. The third and fifth strings open should be an octave apart. 4) Finally, lower your sixth string a whole step from E to D. The fourth and sixth strings should be an octave apart. As a final check, just match your strings to mine on the tuning reference included on this month's audio CD.

At first glance, the arrangement here looks more like a fingerstyle piece, because of all its arpeggios, but it is indeed a flat pick guitar arrangement, and was recorded as such for this month's accompanying audio CD. Right-hand wise, there aren't many obstacles. While we've got many instances of chord strums (consisting of two or more stacked notes), just think of the arpeggios as extended or elongated strums. Play them by dragging your pick downward wherever possible, rather than crosspicking them. The first measure is a good example. Hold down the third string 2nd fret and fourth string 3rd fret, and then, beginning with the fifth string, drag your pick downward all the way to the first string. The next note, the second string open, should probably be played with an up stroke, but it really doesn't matter. Ditto for the fourth string 7th fret and third string open which end the measure. You could play them with a down and up stroke respectively, but again, it really doesn't matter. The arrangement is designed to be played a little slower than what's considered usual for the piece (a Buddy Greene influence again), so the tempo will accommodate just about any picking approach that seems logical and comfortable for you.

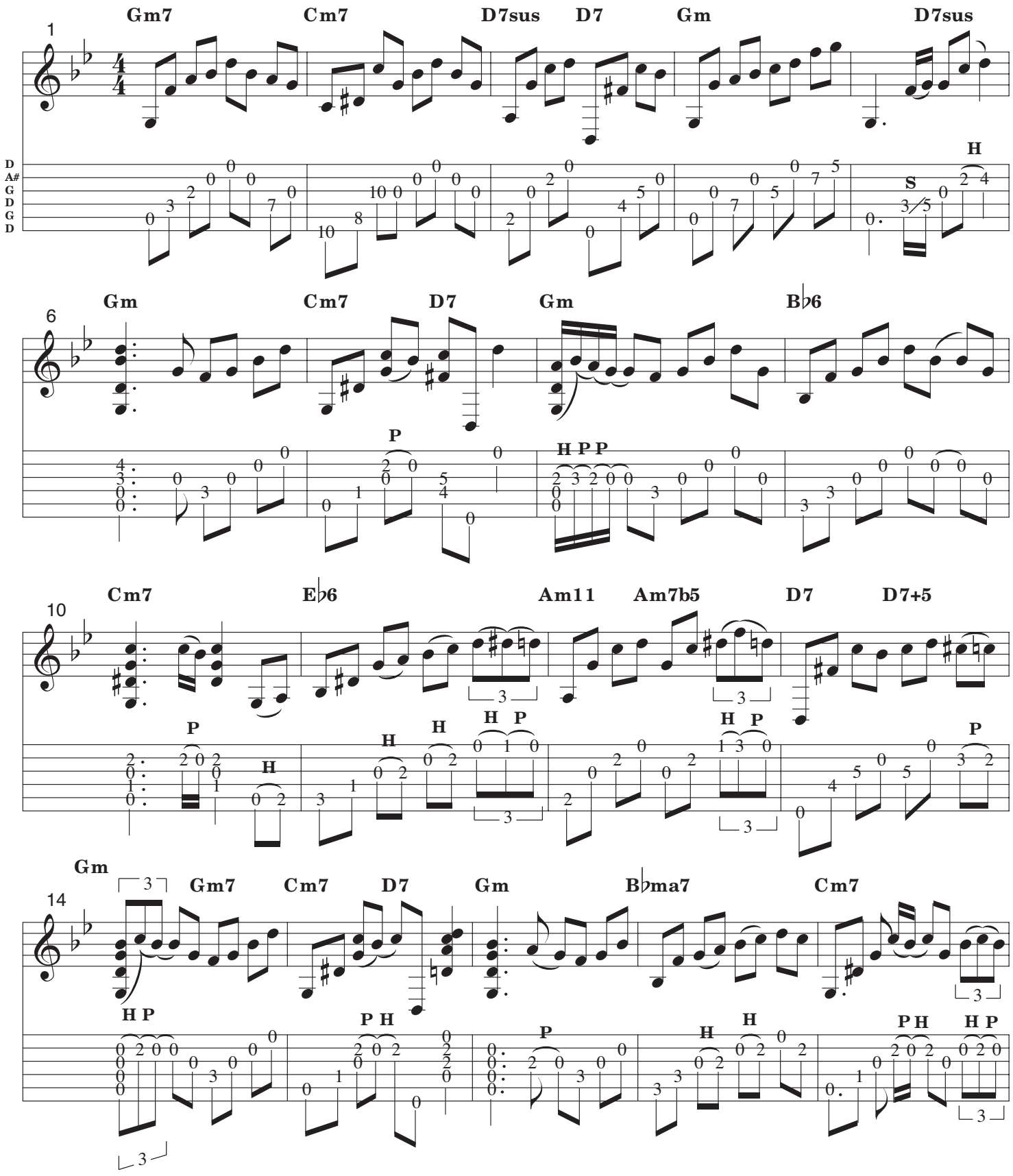
Hope you get some mileage out of the arrangement, and hope the tuning inspires you to either write a song of your own, or to try working out a tune you already play in a minor key in standard tuning. "House of the Rising Sun" works really well for example, and if you want to try your hand at a fiddle tune such as "Jerusalem Ridge," just get a banjo tab for it in G minor tuning. To play such a piece on guitar, a couple of small adjustments here and there would be necessary, as well as a fair amount of crosspicking. The tradeoff or reward, however, would be that great hammered dulcimer-like sustain that's so elusive for guitar players.

As always, please pay us a visit at www.lewalt.com, and if you're in need of chord forms for "Wayfaring Stranger," just write me at the address shown here, and I'll send them to you at no charge.

I'm a poor wayfaring stranger, while traveling through this world of woe,
Yet there's no sickness, toil, or danger, in that bright world to which I go.
I'm going there to see my Father, I'm going there no more to roam,
I'm only going over Jordan, I'm only going over home.
I know dark clouds will hang around me, I know my way is rough and steep,
Yet beauteous fields lie just before me, where God's redeemed their vigils keep,
I'm going there to see my mother, she said she'd meet me when I come,
I'm only going over Jordan, I'm only going over home.

Audio CD
Tracks 48-49

Wayfaring Stranger

Arranged by Harold Streeter

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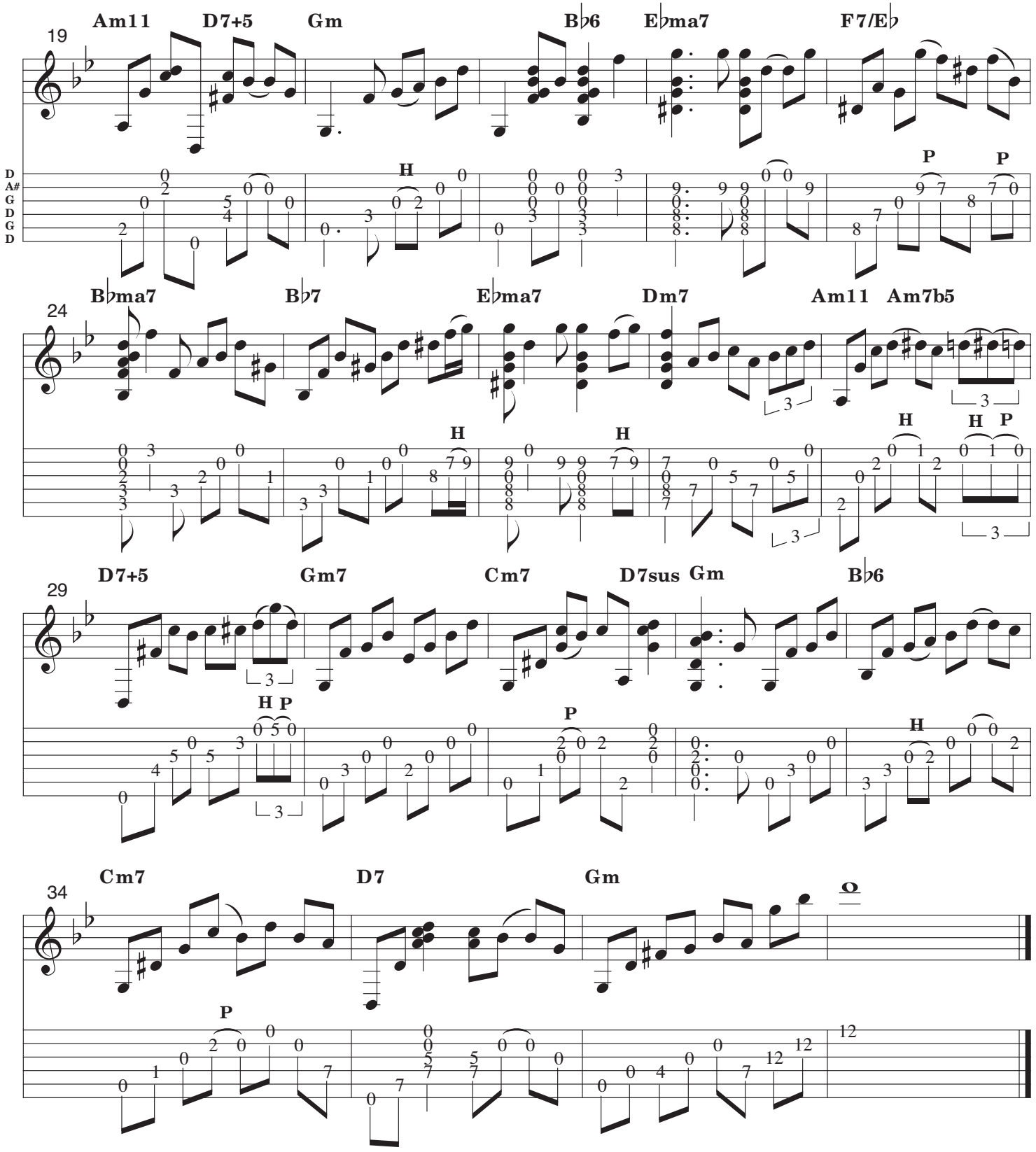
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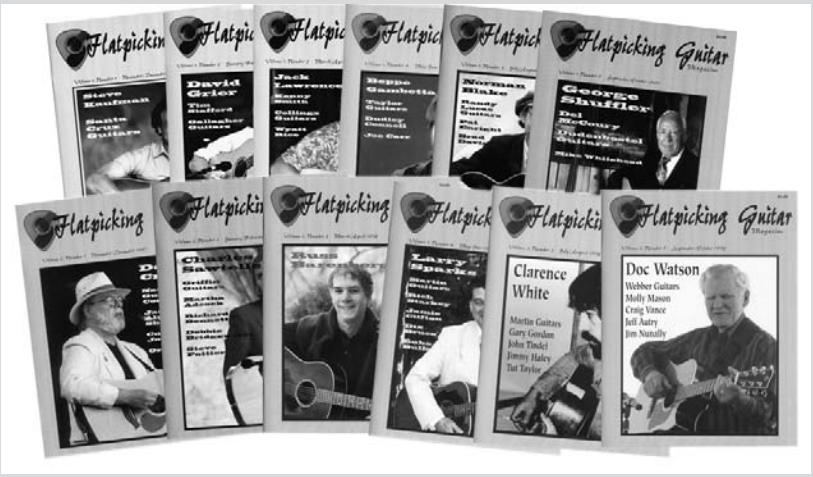
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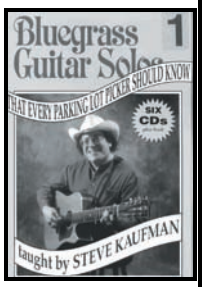

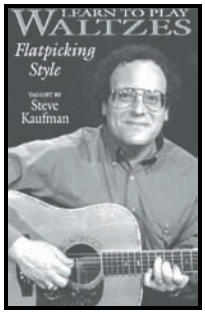

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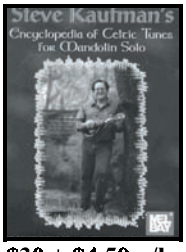

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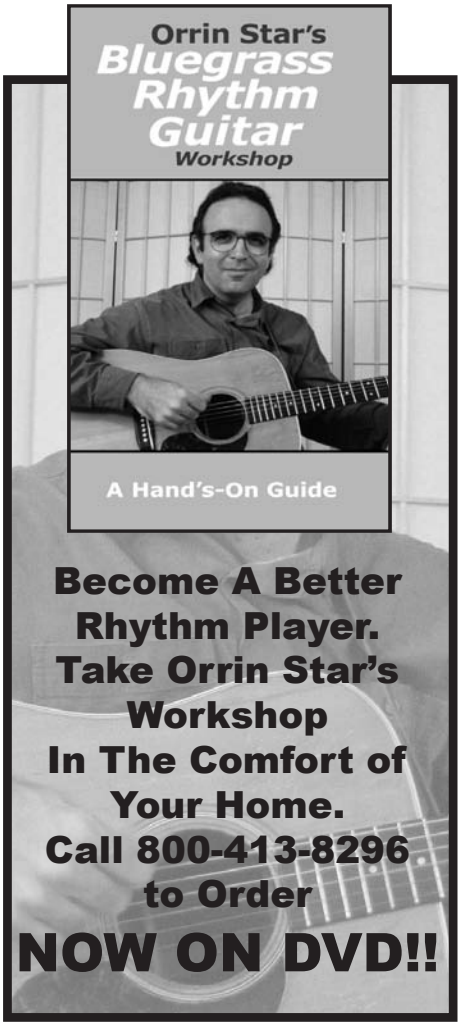
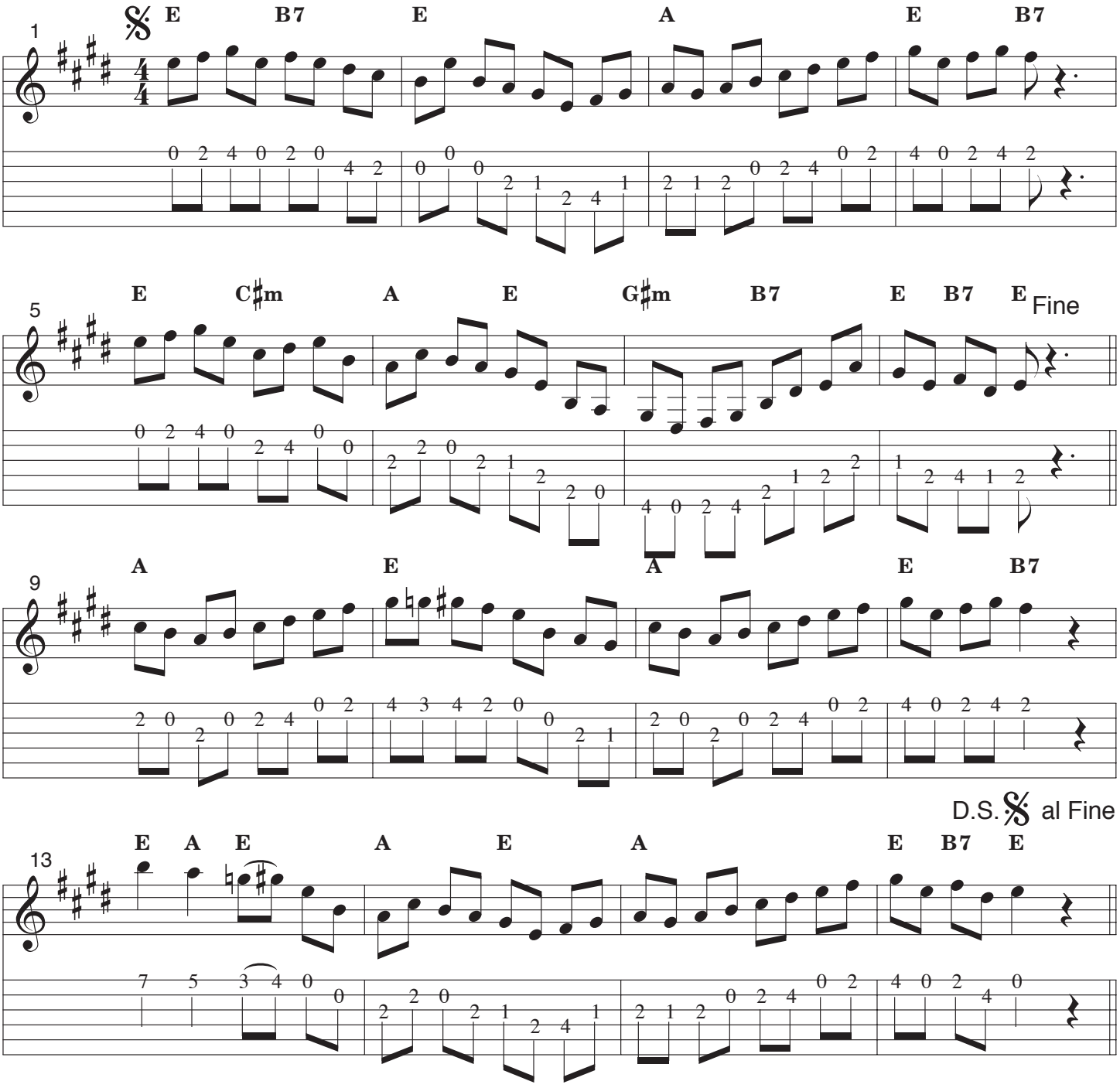


Audio CD
Track 50

Collin's Quest

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PICKIN' FIDDLE TUNES
by Adam Granger

VARIATIONS ARE THE SPICE OF LIFE

READING *EASYTAB*

Easytab is like conventional tablature, except that timing notation has been streamlined and simplified. Since fiddle tunes are comprised mainly of eighth notes, *Easytab* uses the eighth note as its basic unit. An eighth rest is indicated by a dot. Therefore, a note with a dot after it is a quarter note, and a note with three dots after it is a half note. There are a total of eight notes and rests per measure.

FOR BEGINNERS

Pick with an alternating style: down-up-down-up-down-up etc. The first note of each measure should be a downstroke, the last an upstroke. **Include rests** in this alternating pattern. This keeps you "in synch", playing downstrokes on the beats, so that, no matter what the configuration of notes and rests in an eight-unit measure, the right hand plays them down-up-down-up-down-up-down-up.

Howdy, pickers one and all. It's been quite a while since we talked about variations, and I aim to correctify that situation right here and now. Let's briefly revisit the variation (scientific name: *variationus fiddilus cum plectrum guitarum*):

[Note: This is the winner of the Long Sentence Award] If I walk into the room, and you're playing something to the progression of *Forky Deer*, and I can hear that it's *not Forky Deer*, but I can tell from the content of what you're playing that the tune being interpreted *is Forky Deer*, then you're playing a variation; if, on the other hand, you're playing a series of licks (to whatever degree of success of catenation) that fit the progression, then you're jamming to the progression instead of playing a variation. This is my judgment, and there are those who would disagree with it. I'm drawing a kind of classical definition here, where both inventions and variations invoke the original theme on a regular-enough basis that the piece is recognizable at almost any turn.

But anyhoo, folks, my definitions of "variation" and "jamming to the progression" (hereafter known as JTP) bear no intended value judgment. I find variations more interesting, because, if I can recognize the tune, then I can see, and better appreciate (or not), the artistry of the picker. If I know from whence they came, I can appreciate their journey all the more. Does JTP have a place in my life? You bet! Pretty much any time I'm taking a break on a tune I don't know, I'm JTPing, while simultaneously searching enthusiastically for the essence of the melody. Also, I don't want it to be thought that I never would employ JTP for fun also: If Joe Blow and I are on our fifth solo each of *Forky Deer*, I'm going to feel comfortable—and may even find it necessary—to stray farther and farther from the melody. It's a good opportunity to stay sharp on my JTP chops. Okay, enough sere pedantic avuncularity. Let's play some variations.

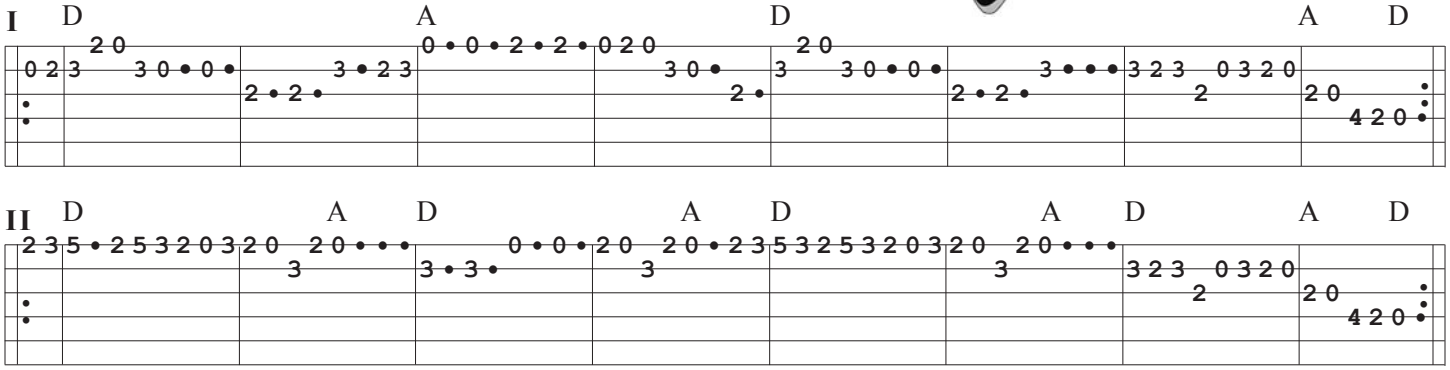
Arkansas Traveler is as viable a vehicle as any for our little jaunt to Variationville. It's a straight-ahead "square" (i.e., A-A-B-B 32-bar) tune that most of us pick (and if we don't, we should). Even if you pick this tune already, take a few minutes to acquaint yourself with the plain-jane version presented here. It'll let you know where I'm coming from, so to speak, when we get into the variations. Also, note that I have set this in uncapoed D. Lots of people play it out of a C position (which is how I learned it), but it lays very nicely in open D. Finally, note that this version is to be played in the 2-5 fret position. A lack of first-fret notes coupled with an abundance of fifth-fret notes is the tipoff. Oh yeah; one more thing: notice that the progression changes from variation to variation: we have often discussed the malleability and variablity of fiddle tune progressions in this column.

Okay, let's dive into the basic version:

ARKANSAS TRAVELER—basic version

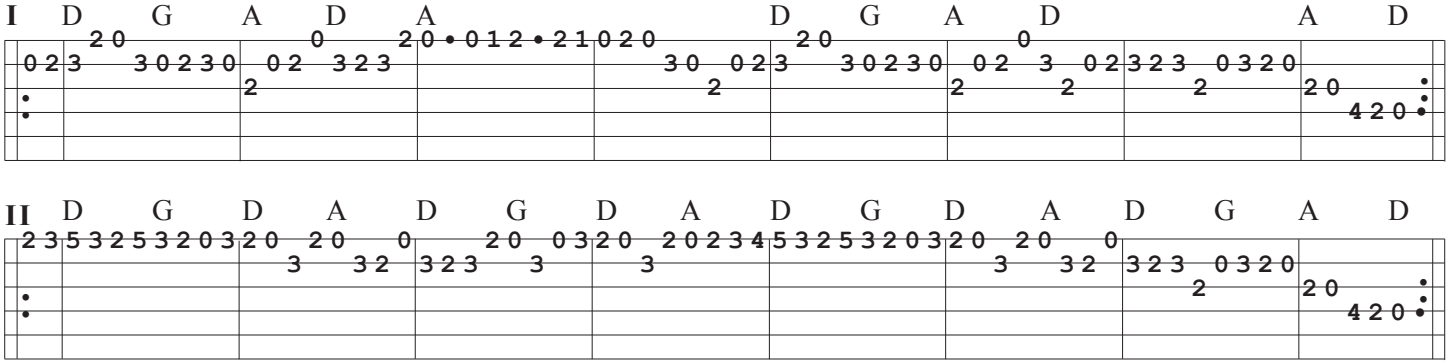
Audio CD Track 51

KEY: D (2)



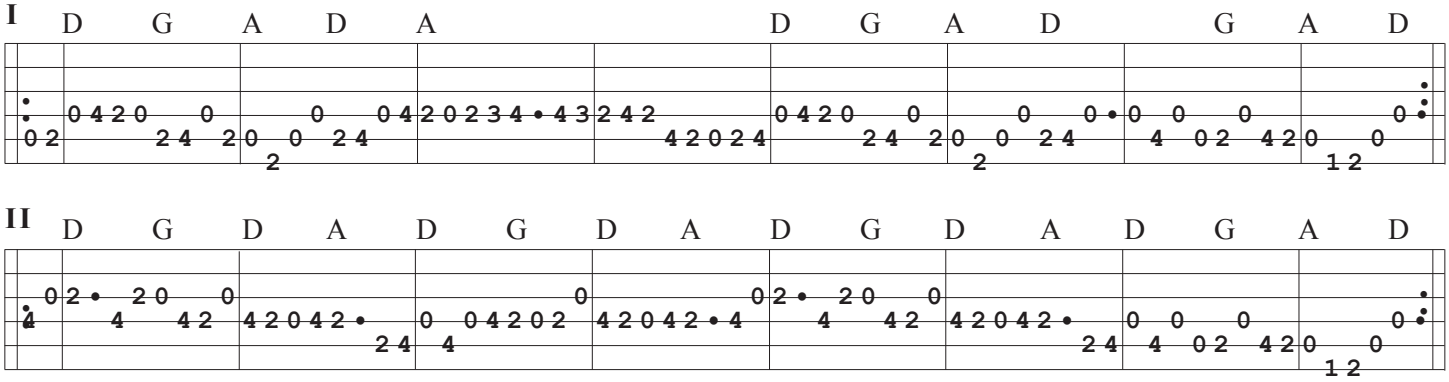
All right: on to the first variation. I have employed here one of the essential variation-creating devices, filling in the eighth rests in the basic version. It's still *Arkansas Traveler*; it just got a little busier. This version is not significantly more difficult to pick than the basic, so be not afraid.

ARKANSAS TRAVELER—first variation



All right, and finally, we go down to the basement where, as is so often the case, we find we have room to pick almost the entire melody. The one note we can't hit is the last note of both the first and second parts. Instead of the low root (D) note, we've got to fudge upward to the higher D. Unfortunately, this note is particularly important precisely because it is the last note, and is thus the ultimate definer of the phrase. If we decided it was important enough to hit the low D, we could always tune the low E string down a step (which is, in fact, something I often do when picking in uncapoed D). It is nevertheless surprising to most people that 99 percent of the tune fits down there in the basement. And you thought it was unusable space! Just clean it up a bit, put in a few throw pillow and some shag carpet and the old TV and you're set.

ARKANSAS TRAVELER—low variation



As I mentioned, the last note of a part or phrase is particularly important. If you're JTPing or variationing all over the place and your picking gets really weird or out there, so that the tune is barely recognizable any more, all will be forgiven if you hit the original last note at the right time. It makes a statement that you knew what you were doing all along, and that if it didn't make sense to the listener, it's just because they're not as musically hip as you. If, on the other hand, you end on a random note—even if it's a scale note (and thus not a sour or "wrong" note) the entire phrase or part is revealed as having been constructed of arbitrary scale notes. It will be revealed that you were sort of grasping at musical straws, and that , when your solo is done, you just sort of stopped whereever you happened to be at the moment.

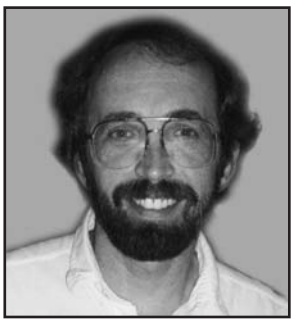
All right, there's our refresher on variations. We've had several discussions on variations over the years. The main things to remember are to keep a semblance of the original melody and to end your phrases and parts on notes that are recognizable from the seminal melody. Now, the next time I see you all, I want you to have at least four variations to pick for me. Promise? Okay, good. I'll sleep in peace tonight. . .

Adam's most recent appearance on A Prairie Home Companion *was May 10, 2003. He performed an original song,* Mr and Mrs Jones, *which is the title song of his new album. Adam hates calling albums "projects", and he hates calling his merchandise "product". He feels that both of the these terms come from the "business" end of the music business, and he doesn't like the business end of the music business. (He likes the "music" end of the music business.) And as to those who say, "But it's not an album; it's a CD", Adam rejoinders, "LP's weren't albums either: they borrowed that name from 78 rpm records, which came several to a set and were packaged in albums." And then, if he still has an audience, Adam points out that a "battery" is not actually a battery either, but a single cell. A battery, originally, was a bunch of cells hooked together externally.*

Exploring Bluegrass Guitar

Rest Strokes Revisited

by Steve Pottier



Back in Volume 1 Number 3 of FGM (Mar/Apr 1997), both Joe Carr and I had columns describing the rest stroke, perhaps the most important technique to master in bluegrass guitar playing. I thought it would be good to revisit this technique in the context of lead playing.

First, a review of the rest stroke technique itself. Do this: hold a G chord, the strum from the low string to the high string, slowly enough so that each note is sounded separately (sometimes gospel quartets are started or ended with this kind of strum). You've just executed consecutive rest strokes! The pick starts from a position of being on the string you're about to play, pushes through the string and comes to rest on the next higher string (hence the name). Key points:

1. The pick starting position is that of being in solid contact with the string you're going to play.
2. The flat side of the pick in angled down (as if you were going to strum) toward the face of the guitar at about 45 degrees.
3. The right hand action is one of providing leverage to the thumb to push the pick through the string.
4. The pick comes to a solid rest, pushing against the next higher string. No bouncing or floating!!

A rest stroke pair occurs when you do a rest stroke on consecutive strings. The first rest stroke sets up the second one. The neat thing here is the timing. You can alter the way the two notes sound together to make it sound like you're spitting the notes out or you can get a "three" feel so that the rhythm of the lead will have a shuffle feel to it (as in Clarence White's lead in to "I Am A Pilgrim").

"Amazing Grace" is a good tune to illustrate. This arrangement uses a lot of rest stroke pairs, imparting some of that shuffle feel. It also uses a technique I call a "rake": a rest-stroke like strum up or down and ending on the target note.

Example 1 starts with rest stroke pairs as a lead in to the first C note, establishing the shuffle feel. The end of M2 and beginning of M3 is actually a rest stroke pair, but the second note is a hammer-on. M4 has an upward rake, with the note on the 4th string as the target note. Just drag the pick up until you hear your target note. Rest stroke pairs from M5-6 and again from M6-7 continue the shuffle feel. M7 has a rest stroke pair as well: play the notes on the 5th and fourth strings as a pair, then another rest stroke as you start the slide, completing the pair on the open 3rd string. M9 has another rake, this time a downward rake, kind of like the trilling your tongue, and ending on the target note of the open 3rd string. M10 ends with a run down to the 5th string, all rest strokes. M11 has a grace note hammer on. This means a quick hammer that sounds as if it was just part of the one note. Again, rest strokes. Rest stroke pairs in M13, delayed rest stroke pairs in M14-15, Rest stroke pairs in 15, and finally a rest stroke run in M16.

Example 2 is just a variation of Example 1 using all rest strokes. M7 uses the run 2 - 1 - 0 on the 4th string, but syncopates it to emphasize the shuffle. Same idea at the end of M8. M11 has a triplet pull off that sounds harder than it is. if you start with 1 on the 4th string instead of 2, it has a "bluesier" sound a la Clarence White. There is an extra hammer-on in M15.

Example 3 is an up-the-neck variation using a lot of rest strokes. I start with my little finger on the 6th string. I imagine a G shaped chord at the fifth fret with my little finger on the "G" of this shape. The run outlines the chord and slides up with the third finger to an F-shaped chord. The third finger stays put while the first and second fingers stretch down a fret to catch the slides. Did you catch the rest stroke pairs in the opening run? M4 starts with the first finger on the 3rd string. Rest stroke pairs (and I'm visualizing a C shaped chord with these notes as part of the chord). M5 ends with rest stroke pairs and a slide up to the C note as in M2. Then there is a little breather, a little space with nothing much happening. This is good! M7 has a rake and a short run to a slide to a G. I see this as an A chord shape barred at the tenth fret, but I'm only playing two notes of it (third and fourth fingers). M8 has a run down on the second string while you continue to hold the second string. M9 starts a little double stop blues run reminiscent of Chuck Berry. These double stops are just done with short strokes, not rest strokes. Use all down strokes, however. M11 has rest stroke pairs. Note the "spitting" timing. You can play this straight as well, but the slight play with the timing gives it some character. M13 has rest stroke pairs to a slide. M14 uses a rest stroke on the 4th string, but the two-note pairs are just a short strum. M16 ends with a nice arpeggio on the C chord, just push a rest stroke all the way through to the top!

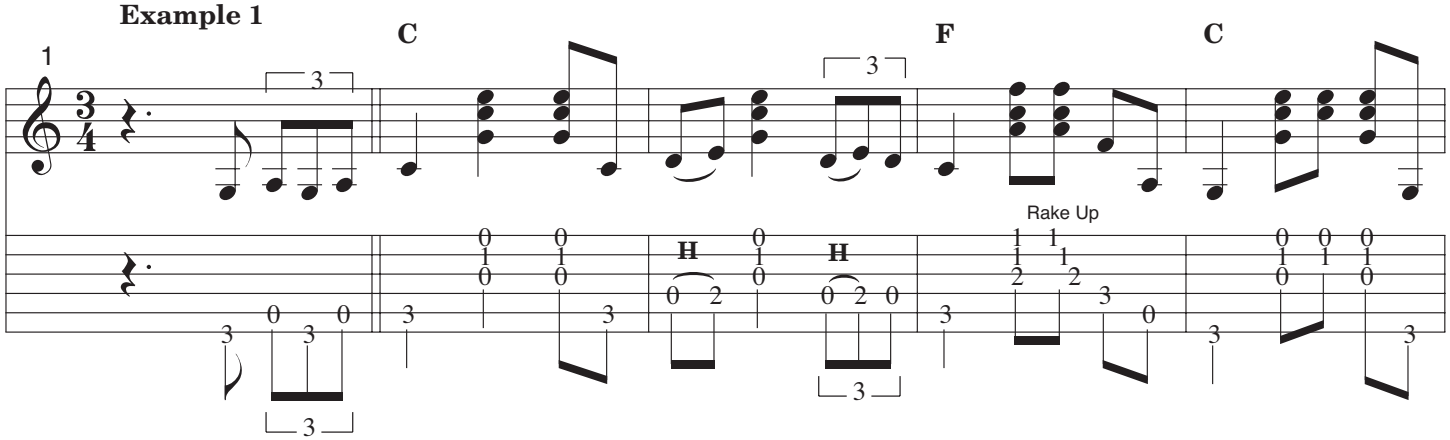
Have fun with this tune as you work on rest strokes. You might find they can be addicting!

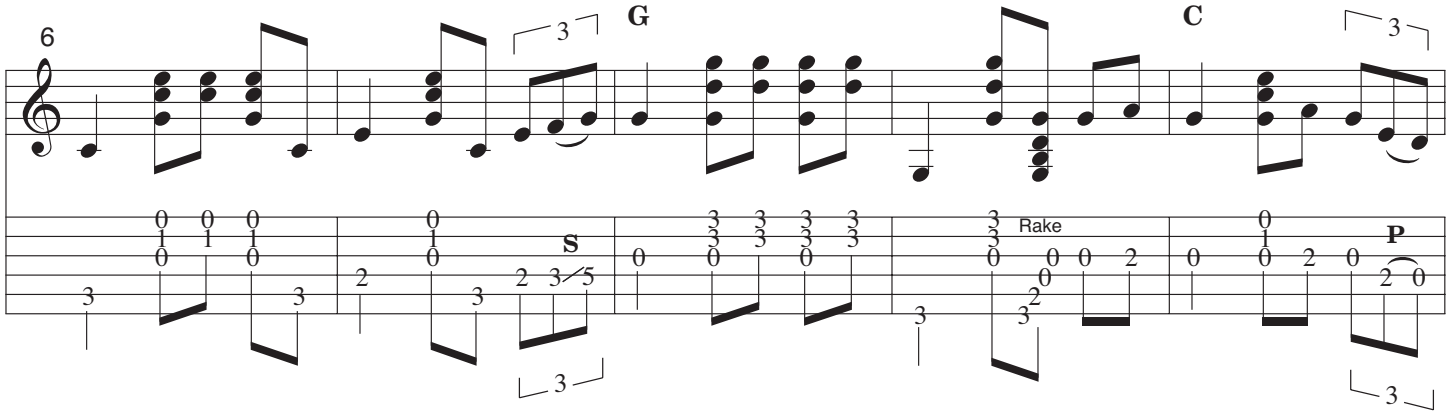
Audio CD
Track 52

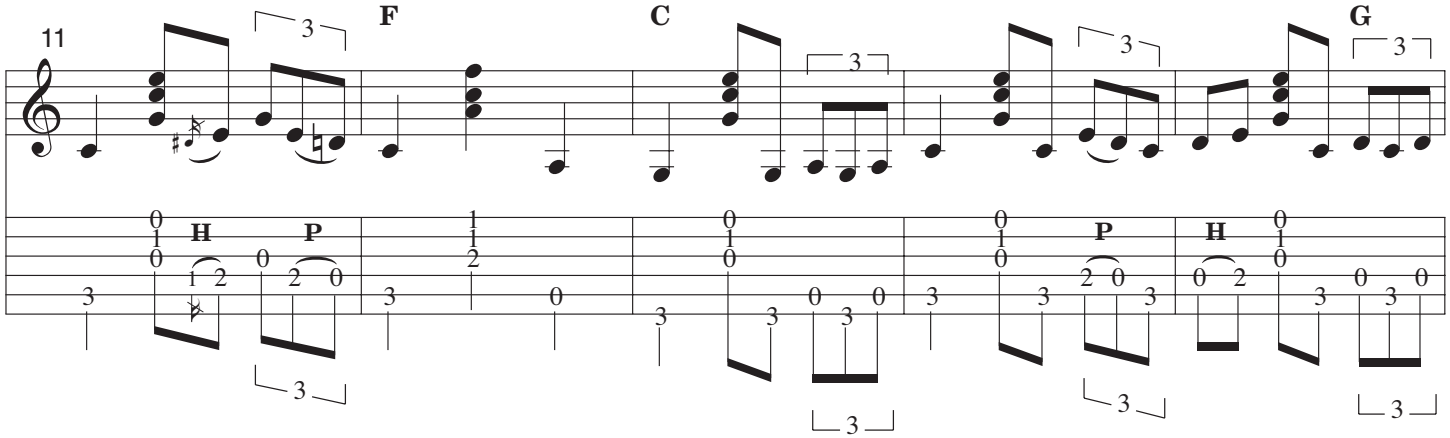
Amazing Grace

Arranged by Steve Pottier

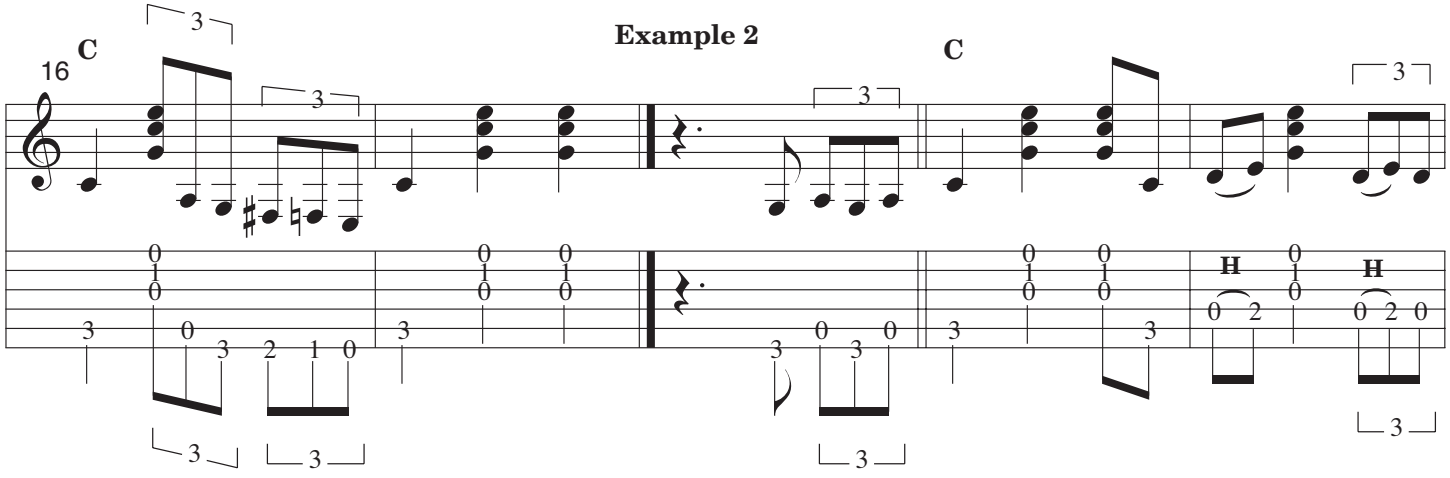
Example 1







Example 2



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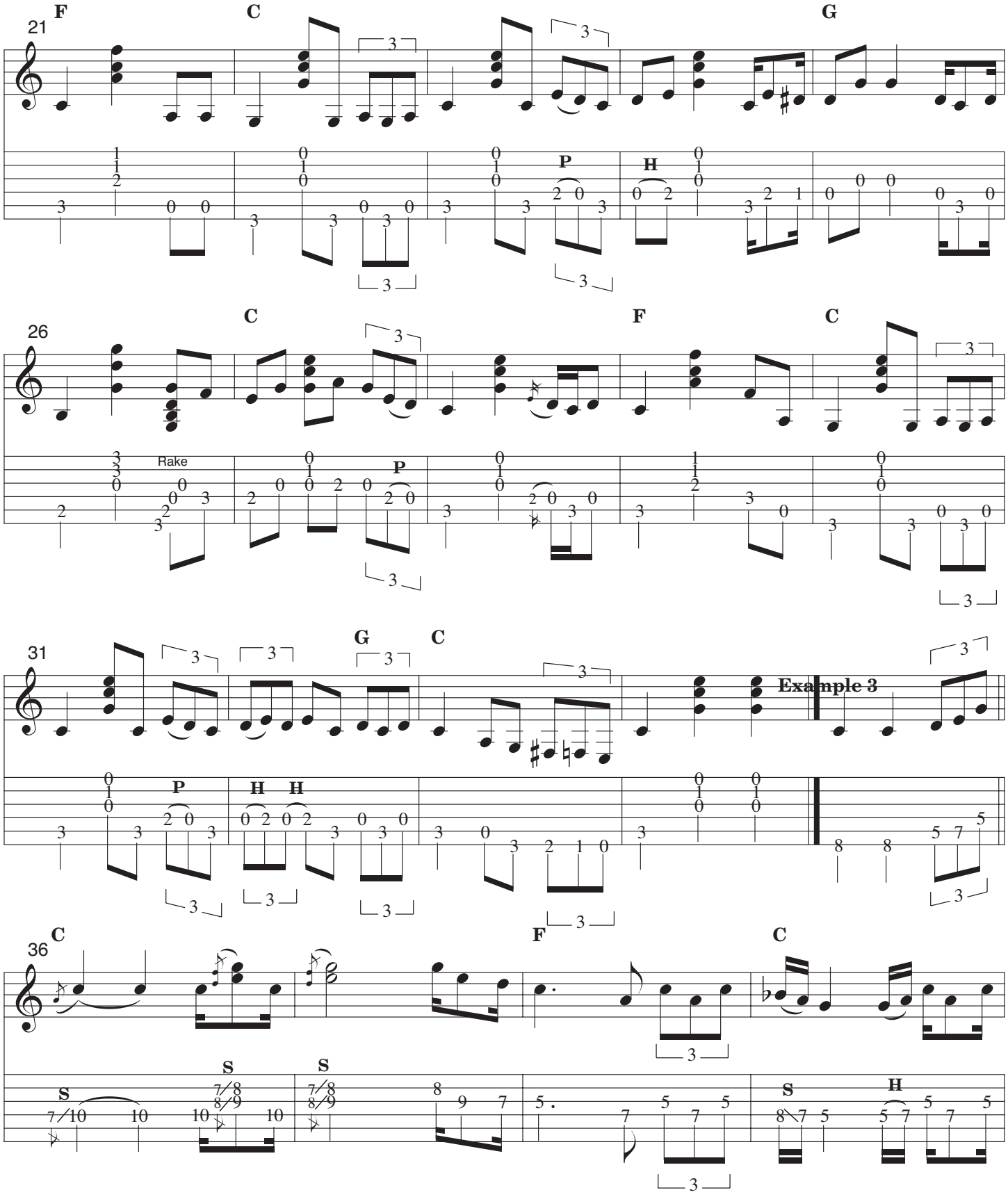
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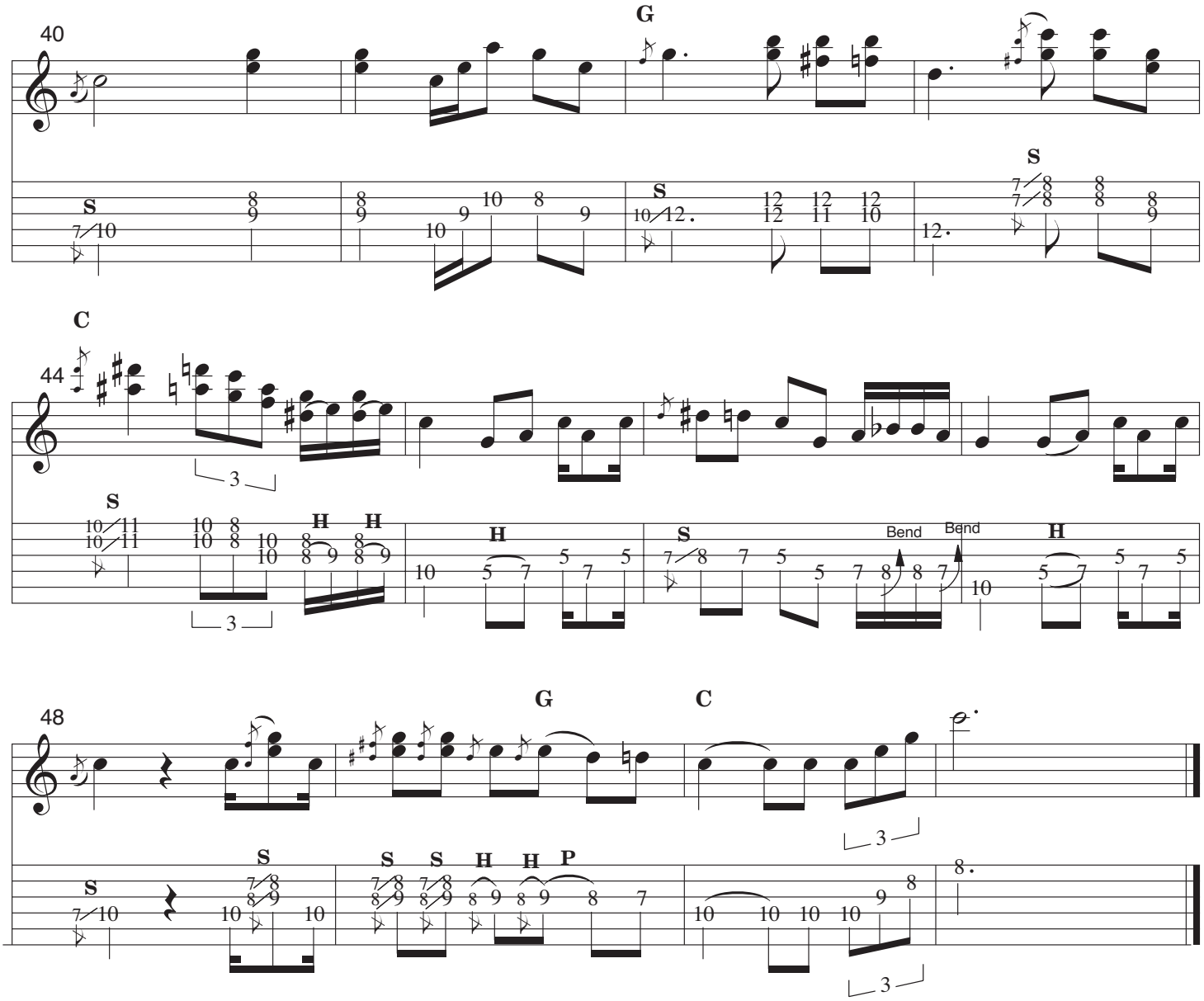
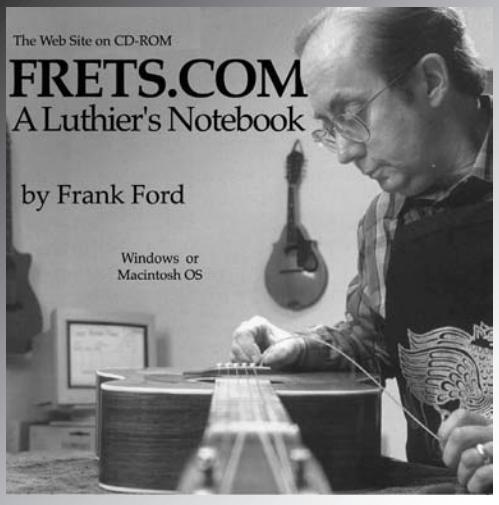

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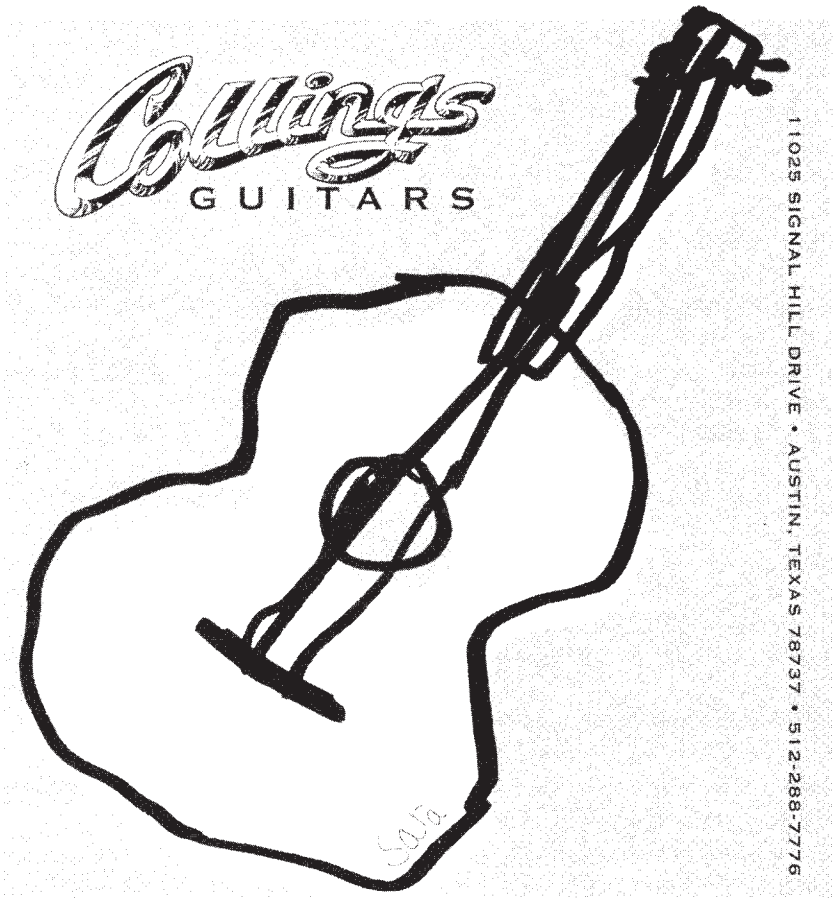
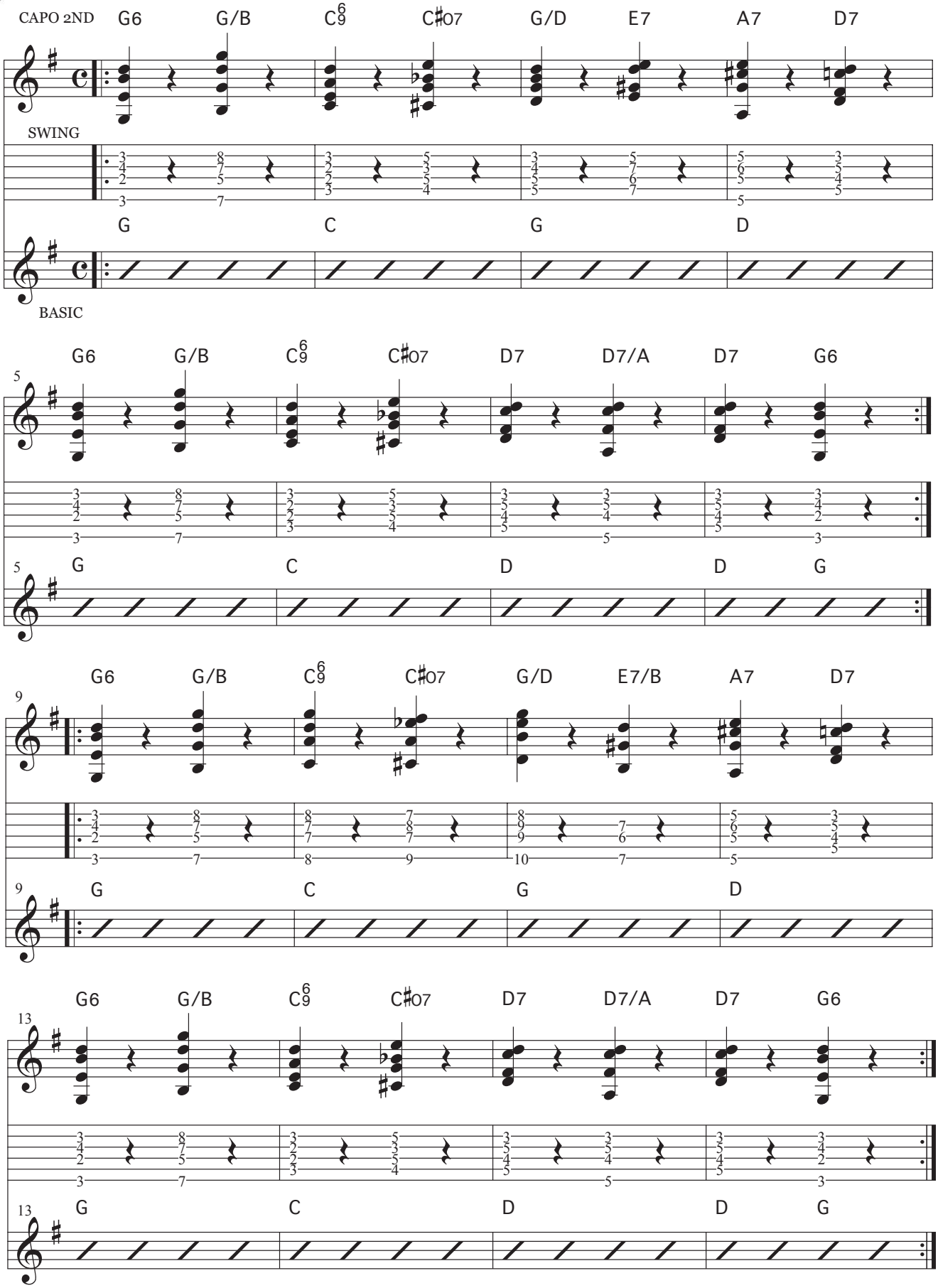


Audio CD
Tracks 54 & 55

Grey Eagle

Arranged by John McGann

CAPO 2ND
G6 G/B C6/9 C#o7 G/D E7 A7 D7
SWING
G C G D
BASIC
G6 G/B C6/9 C#o7 D7 D7/A D7 G6
G C D D G
G6 G/B C6/9 C#o7 G/D E7/B A7 D7
G C G D
G6 G/B C6/9 C#o7 D7 D7/A D7 G6
G C D D G

New Release Highlight
Chris Silver: Souls & Spirits

by Chris Thiessen

By day a high school technology instructor in River Falls, WI, Chris Silver is a singer/songwriter/performer by night, by afternoon, by weekends, or whenever he can find time to pursue the musical passion that's been a constant companion since he was 16. *Souls and Spirits* is Chris's third solo project, perhaps his ninth or tenth album overall, and his latest exploration into bluegrass and the musical lands beyond.

Raised in a musical family, Chris started playing guitar early. A native of the Twin Cities, MN area, Chris took lessons from Adam Granger (FGM columnist). "I was a teen and bringing in all these tunes. Adam would patiently tab the tunes out and then help me learn them. He never once suggested any tune might be too complex. He was great." The musical eclecticism in his family has carried through to today. "Bill Monroe, Clarence White, and Doc Watson were my traditional bluegrass models, but then there's an influence of Irish music, and jazz, and swing. I listen to as much of everything as I can, and fold it in wherever I can."

During 1987-1992, Chris was part of Stoney Lonesome, considered one of the Midwest's premier bluegrass bands. "Looking back, we were the kid prodigies, storming around, playing everywhere as much as we could and making great music." Since leaving Stoney Lonesome, he's worked with a number of other bands in the Midwest, most recently with Tangled Roots. He also does a number of duet gigs each year with Brian Wicklund, who plays fiddle on *Souls and Spirits* as well as on Tangled Roots' CD, *Angel From Montgomery*.

One of his recent activities has been to start up an acoustic music club at the River Falls High School. "I just encourage the students to play, and one afternoon these two guys came in and performed 'Jessica' flawlessly from start to finish. It was pretty amazing, and pretty inspirational." But that inspiration does not come without an epiphany or two. "At 25, with Stoney Lonesome, we were pushing the music as hard as we could. Now, at 40, I can look at music a little differently. I respect those folks who can play blazingly fast. When I attend

IBMA, I'm in the audience as astounded as anyone else. But I come back home and have time to reflect on how and where the music I make now should go, how it should be different."

"I discuss that with the students at the acoustic music club. Listening—and being open to change—is part of a musician's training. Listening carefully to the different masters of an instrument develops the ability to discern their stylistic differences, so I know how Jesse McReynolds sounds versus Sam Bush, or Chubby Wise versus Vassar Clements. Developing the ability to play several instruments helps that as well. What I once heard as a 'guitar solo' or a 'mandolin solo' has now become more a melody that needs to be expressed a particular way."

Chris's conscious artistic focus is apparent in "IOU Sam," his tribute to Sam Bush. "Sam has raw energy, but he also has melodic complexity. I was celebrating the spaciousness of his music, his timing and phrasing, his ability to surprise you musically. Clarence White, Charles Sawtelle, and Miles Davis were all masters of the musical surprise. That's what I'm now looking at."

In that vein, Chris looks at all music as potential sources for that surprise. "Love Train" is one such tune. "Initially I started playing this with the band as a joke, a fooling-around tune, and then each musician started taking it seriously and working up solid parts. It just happened, like Bill Monroe meeting the OJays. In retrospect, it's not a bad thing at all. I guess this is the 'message' tune for the CD."

"Railroad Blues" is based on a Langston Hughes poem of the same name. "I was reading this poem and the bluesy rhythm seemed to come out of it," Chris remembers. "And then there's this echo of 'Reuben's Train,' just because. I don't know what's with this tune, but it's getting a lot of college airplay."

"Fat Brown Trout" is a Silver-penned instrumental. With a great trout stream behind his house in the St. Croix River Valley, Chris finds the fly fishing provides a great way to focus and release creativity. There's a spot where potentiality lives, where the next fish or tune may rise to the surface. "Woozel's Reel," a collaboration between Chris and fiddler Brian Wicklund, has an old-time feel, and is named in honor of Hazel, the Silver family dog who died during the production of the CD.

"Same Old Places" rises out of Chris's exhilaration and exhaustion from being in Stoney Lonesome when he was 25. Now, in a different musical situation and a bit older, Chris reflects on how things change. "Down in the Valley" is a Silver rework of the classic tune. "We sung this to death in elementary school; I think it's the Midwest American anthem. But when I was older I rediscovered the lyrics by themselves in a book of American folk tunes, and was inspired to write a new tune for those words."

In addition to writing or co-writing more than half of the cuts on the CD, Chris also draws from other writers. "I met Peter Keane while touring with Stoney Lonesome. He had written 'Train Fifty' as a slower, fingerstyle tune. I sped it up a bit and added a minor chord to enhance the blues. John Gorka ["Gypsy Life"] is a neighbor of mine, living just up the St. Croix River Valley. He's an endless source of great story songs, and has this amazing ability to pull you into a song with lyrics." Silver also includes tunes from the performances of Bill Grant and Delia Bell ("Red Clay of Georgia") and George Jones ("'I Can't Get Over You' was a Stoney Lonesome favorite").

The CD closes with "The Possum's Mystery Tour." Chris explains: "We've got a lot of possums in the St. Croix River Valley, and

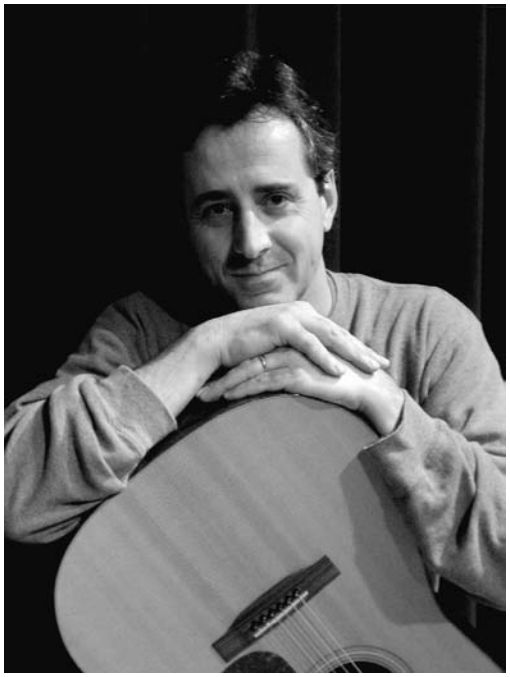
sometimes you just have to wonder what's going on in their little possum brains as they wander around. For some time (as a joke) Brian [Wicklund] and I were adding the word 'possum' to everything we were writing. Brian helped me sort this out into a tune that starts out old-timey, gets a little jazzy, and sort of grows from there."

Acting as producer for the CD was an adventure as well. "I had arranged and charted everything out, so that all the musicians knew basically what I wanted. Since I had worked with most of them before, I knew they could – and would – go from there. But mixing took a lot more time than I originally thought. I just wanted to be sure that each instrument or voice could be heard. John Scherf was great."

Chris's voice sounds a bit like Steve Goodman's, expressive and believable when he sings the story songs that populate this CD. Harmony work by Heather and Dawn Schimpp adds just the right, light touch to the CD's audible fabric.

For the record, Chris plays a 1979 Martin D-18 Custom, with scalloped forward-shifted bracing. "I've always liked the warmth of mahogany, especially when recording," he notes. "But I've recently ordered a rosewood D-sized guitar from Michael Heiden. Since I play a Heiden F-5, I'm looking forward to seeing what a rosewood Heiden is like."

Souls and Spirits was released in March of this year through Catch & Release Records (CRR72298) of River Falls, WI. For further information on Chris Silver, see www.silvermusic.net. On the following pages we provide a transcription of "Fat Brown Trout" which also appears on the audio CD accompanying this issue.



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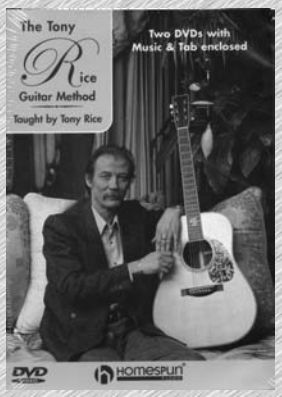

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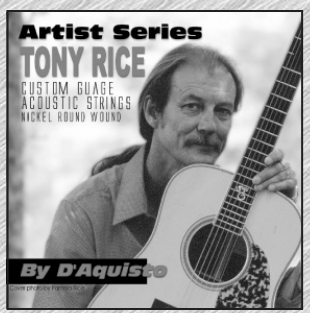
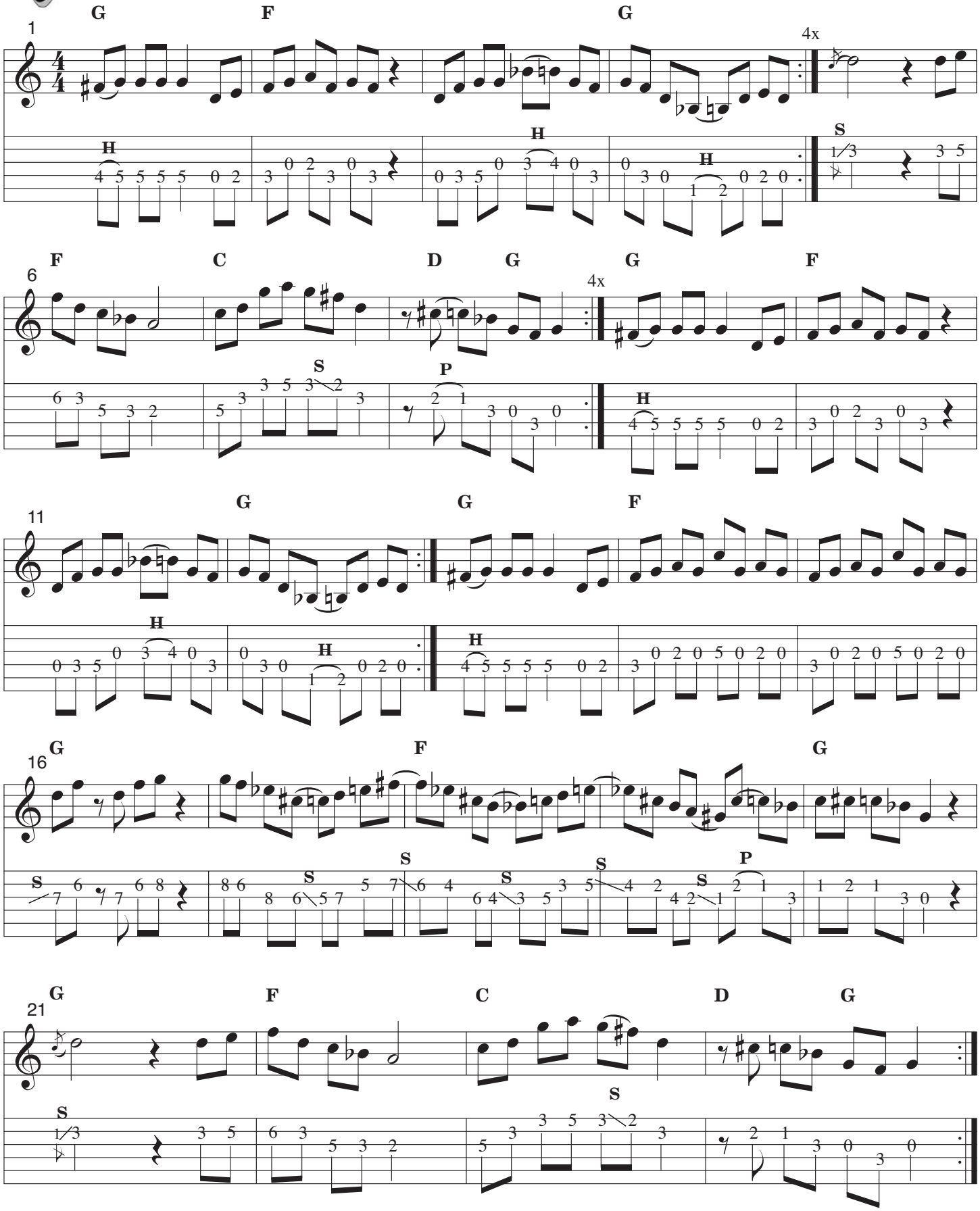
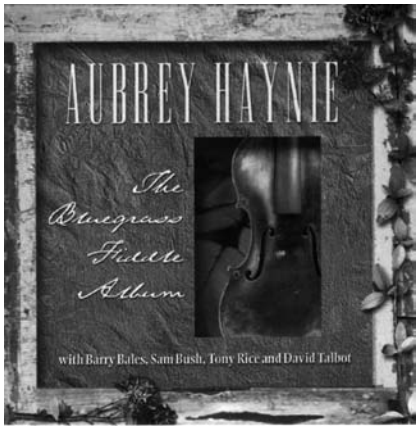


Audio CD
Track 57

Fat Brown Trout

Arranged by Chris Silver

Reviews

Aubrey Haynie:
The Bluegrass Fiddle Album
Sugar Hill 3957



Reviewed by
Bryan "Bluegrass" Kimsey

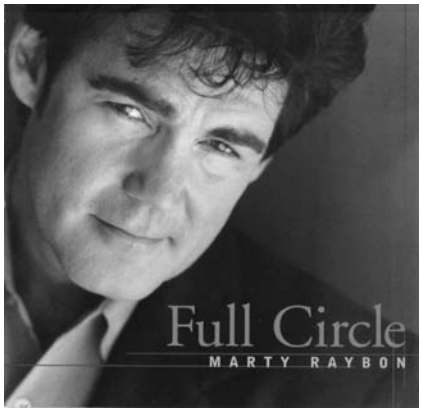
I love truth in advertising. How many times have you bought a CD only to find that the "Bluegrass Hits of 1992" was actually more country/rock (and more rock, at that) than bluegrass? It's happened to me more times than I can count (that is, at least once!). That's why this CD, by Aubrey Haynie, is great. He calls it *The Bluegrass Fiddle Album*, and I tell you, that's exactly what it is!! No swing, no country, no rock 'n roll. Just bluegrass. And mostly fiddle, too! Sure, there's Tony Rice, Sam Bush, Barry Bales, and David Talbot's names on the cover, but this is a fiddle album. Think Kenny Baker Plays Bill Monroe and you're getting the right idea. When there are five breaks on a tune, the fiddle takes three of them and the banjo and mandolin split the others. I think there's two guitar solos on the entire album.

So, why should flatpickers care about this CD? Easy. 1) Tony Rice plays great rhythm guitar. 2) every flatpicker should listen to a lot of fiddle and try to copy it as much as possible. 3) flatpickers should also listen to mandolin players. (Except when they get too bossy, of course), 4) it's good music and good music is amazingly hard to find. There are some neat tunes here (like "Ducks on the Millpond" and "Bluegrass in the Backwoods") that we don't hear much of, but which could easily become jam standards. And after hearing several guitar players guitarterrorize "Ook Pik Waltz," it's great to hear a fiddler remind us of how the song actually goes.

Mark O'Connor wrote the liner notes and wrote them like he would like to have someone write his liner notes: funny, informative, educational, and praising. A most excellent album, highly recommended.

Song List: Buckner's Breakdown; Hamilton Special; Mchattie's Waltz; Ducks On The Millpond; Smith's Rag; Bluegrass In The Backwoods; April's Reel; Make A Little Boat; Ook Pik Waltz; Long Cold Winter; First Day In Town; Bill Cheatham

Full Circle
Marty Raybon
Doobie Shea



By Chris Thiessen

"Roots" or "Americana" music (what folks now call the odd conglomerate of bluegrass, folk, alt country, old-time, and anything other than modern country music) is hot. A number of performers from other genres are resurfacing under the Americana banner. And now Marty Raybon (former lead singer with Shenandoah) comes full circle back to the music of his youth. Of the 13 tunes on this CD, six are from bluegrass legends: Monroe ("Rocky Road Blues" and "Whitehouse Blues"), Flatt and Scruggs ("Down the Road") and Jimmy Martin ("Home Run Man," "Prayer Bells of Heaven" and "The Last Song"). He even covers a tune released twice by Alison Krauss (Hugh Prestwood's "Ghost In This House"). Most of the remaining tunes are Raybon originals.

Marty's got a great voice (although his renditions of Jimmy Martin songs get, well,

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a little too Jimmy Martinish, especially with the assistance of superb tenor Paul Brewster). He has an evocative touch with ballads – "Summertown Road" and "Ghost In This House" are eminently re-listenable. As you might expect, Marty has assembled a killer band to back him up, and that's the primary reason for this review. In addition to Rob Ickes (dobro), Terry Smith (bass), David Talbot (banjo), and a phenomenal fiddler named Shad Cobb, Bryan Sutton covers both guitar and mandolin. To a flatpicker, those instrumentalists provide the greatest delight of this CD. (But keep in mind: this is Marty's CD and he's a singer, so instrumental tunes are not an option.)

Nevertheless, Bryan inserts his characteristically tasty solos, each of which lasts only 10-15 seconds but adds a musical accelerant to the tune. His guitar solos on "Down The Road" (about 1:05 into the tune) and "White House Blues" (at 1:08, with a mandolin solo at :36) illustrate that great Sutton balance between pure melody and inventive re-interpretation. His mandolin work on "Rocky Road Blues," "White House Blues" and "Prayer Bells Of Heaven (put on headphones and listen to Bryan's playing behind the vocals, as well as his solo work!) is no less phenomenal. This guy's just flat-out great. Bryan's new solo CD *Bluegrass Guitar* (hey – didn't Dan Crary have a CD by that name as well? Might be a great A/B comparison!) is getting a lot of good buzz on the listservs as well.

Something, though, bothered me about Marty's CD. I got past the lack of instrumentals, but Marty features fiddle and dobro – and banjo on those Martin tunes – far more than guitar or mandolin. I don't think that's an intentional slight. Those instruments better complement Marty's vocals and may (as well) reinforce his personal vision of fiddle-and-banjo-dominated bluegrass. Personally, I prefer the larger role that guitar now plays in the music, especially if you've got a talent like Bryan in your band.

One last note. A totally unexpected treat was Shad Cobb's fiddling, which reminds me of Chubby Wise's playing with Flatt and Scruggs. Some quick Web research told me that Shad's played with the Osborne Brothers, with the Bear Creek Band, and is currently with Mike Snider. I think he's got a solo CD out, and that definitely goes on my must-have CD list.

So, if you're a Marty Raybon fan, you'll enjoy listening to his voice again and again. But if you're a Bryan Sutton devotee and want to add to your growing Bryan Sutton discography, I'd put *Bluegrass Guitar* higher on the list than *Full Circle*.

Song List: Down The Road; Everything; That's One; Summertown Road; Rocky Road Blues; All In The Hands Of Jesus; Home Run Man; Next To You, Next To Me; Ghost In This House; White House Blues; Webster's Definition; Prayer Bells Of Heaven; The Last Song.

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Beppe Gambetta
Blu di Genova
Gad Fly Records

Reviewed by Kevin Stevenson

Do you know Beppe? If you're reading this magazine there's a chance that you do. He's been a popular instructor at the Kaufman Flatpick Camp for the last six years. Perhaps you've jammed with him in the Kamp Orchestra, or tasted his famous Italian cooking in a late-night dorm-apartment Bacchanalia. He's a regular at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas, where he can be found after midnight, in the woods, in a formal tux and tails performing enchanting European acoustic music from a hundred years ago. Or maybe you've caught a Taylor Guitar Co. clinic with Beppe and his Mentor/Side-kick, Dan Crary (a duo that seems to be on a perpetual international tour). If you don't know Beppe, (and you dig the flatpicked acoustic guitar) then you're missing out on a player that will truly touch you. Gambetta is an Artist. He inhabits a vantage point and possesses a world view that sets him apart from the crowded phalanx of merely great pickers. But just as importantly, he has the skills with a flatpick to articulate and bring to us the thoughts and feelings in his soul.

Beppe, of course, is Italian. But his music is steeped in the bluegrass tradition like few others. He spent his formative years parroting the styles of Doc, Dan, and Norman, and he knows even the most arcane solos of Clarence White, Charles Sawtelle and all the lesser known players of the past. To hear this European sing and play the music of Bill Monroe's Appalachia is a delight that can't be described. The title of Beppe's newest CD is so apropos. *Blu di Genova* is a cloth fabric originated in Gambetta's home town of Genova, Italy. A century ago, this versatile material crossed the ocean and evolved into "Blue Jeans". What a perfect

metaphor for the European influenced, rural flavored, acoustic guitar-centric art that is Beppe Gambetta's music.

Blu di Genova is a long awaited follow up to his CD *Good News from Home*. He's had several albums since, but each with a different focus. On this record we get an incredible example of what can be done with just an acoustic solo guitar in the hands of a virtuoso. And we're also treated to some fine, fine ensemble playing as he is joined by Crary, mandolin great Carlo Aonza, and the legendary Gene Parsons. I suppose a word about instrumentation is in order here. In addition to the purely acoustic textures of guitar, mandolin and banjo, Beppe adds the haunting touches of Oboe and English Horn sparingly throughout the album. His use of the tuba as the bass in "Under the Double Eagle" is as suprising as it is natural. It is, after all, a march (as in John Phillips Souza!)

The highlights for me on this CD are the vocal numbers. "Church Street Blues" is a song closely associated with Tony Rice and Norman Blake. But hearing Beppe's warm, thickly-accented voice, coupled with laid back Southern California harmonies takes this classic song to a completely new dimension. He then sings "A Cima" in his native tongue, and though I don't know enough Italian to order Pizza, I *feel* as if I can understand every word of this heartfelt love song. (And did I mention that the playing and guitar tone is simply beautiful!) "A night in Frontenac" is a combination instrumental tone poem/movie score. I close my eyes and see the story unfold of a young man, stepping out into the warm evening of a very old town. He's soon joined by his companions, and a bawdy, but good natured and harmless adventure ensues. (You might close your own eyes and see something completely different, but the point is… his guitar alone paints the entire landscape and tells the whole story!). Some of the album selections are featured on his instructional video (another must-have for the serious student of flatpicking) and it's great to have them at last on CD.

So, if you don't know Beppe, *Blu di Genova* would be a great place to start. (Check out www.beppegambetta.com) *And if you do know Beppe,* you won't want to be without this wonderful album.

Song List: On the Road with Mama, Fandango per la Bionda, Church Street Blues, Shenandoah Valley Breakdown (Duet with Dan Crary), A Cima, Sestrina, A night in Frontenac, Nova Gelosia/Serenata, Tarantexas, Fuinde, Marcia Americana/ Under the Double Eagle, Red Shoes

Perfect Strangers
Perfect Strangers
Rebel-CD-1793

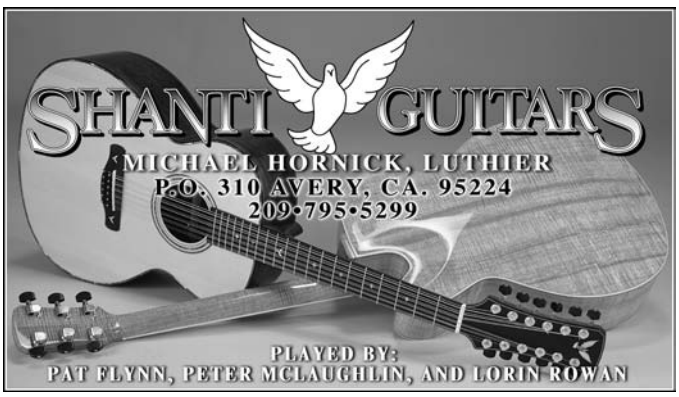
Reviewed by Dan Miller

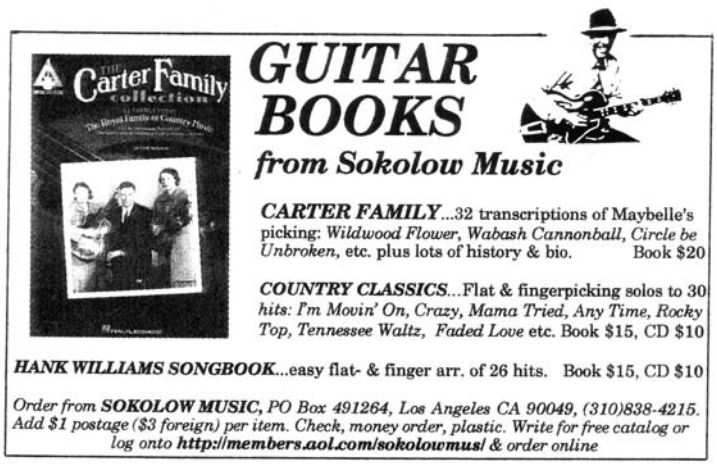
This past February my family and I were traveling across country and stopped to visit friends in Tucson, Arizona. We were going to be there for a couple of days and so I decided to give Peter McLaughlin a call to see if he had time to get together and visit with us. Peter lives in Tucson and every time I had talked with him on the phone over the past few years I had told him that we had friends in Tucson and that if we were ever in the area I would give him a call. So I did, and I'm glad I did. It turns out that while we were there in town Peter's band Perfect Strangers was giving the first performance of a tour that was arranged to promote their recent Rebel release, *Perfect Strangers*.

Being in town for this band's performance was quite a treat since the members of this all-star band are spread out across the country and rarely have an opportunity to perform together. The band consists of Peter McLaughlin on guitar, Bob Black on banjo, Jody Stecher on mandolin, Chris Brashear on fiddle, and Forrest Rose on bass. The show that the band gave that night to a enthusiastic sell-out crowd was entertaining and exciting. It was one of those high energy moments when a group of extremely talented musicians, who love playing together but rarely get the opportunity to do so, get on stage and transmit their excitement and enthusiasm to the audience. Their individual talents come together in a way that makes the whole much greater than the sum of the parts. The same can be said about this recording.

The day after the show I was traveling to southern Arizona and put the disc in the CD player in my car. It was as if I was back at the show experiencing the same excitement and enthusiasm. One of the things I loved about the show, and the CD, was that each member of this band brings to it his individual style, personality, and musical experience and the other guys in the band are such pros at lending support that everyone gets a chance to shine.

The music presented here is traditional bluegrass. However, in that context you should not expect to hear "the same old

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thing." Six of the fourteen tunes are penned by band members, four by Chris Brashear, one by Peter McLaughlin, and one by Bob Black. These songs pay respect to the high and lonesome traditions of bluegrass while at the same time giving it a new voice.

On the second cut of the CD, "Roll On, John" the linear notes describe their rendition of this traditional tune as "Kentucky blues, Strangers style." The same can be said of the rest of the CD. It is traditional bluegrass....Strangers style. And it is a style that draws you in with its traditional approach and then makes you want to sit down and listen for a while with an ear turned toward the compelling attraction of its uniqueness.

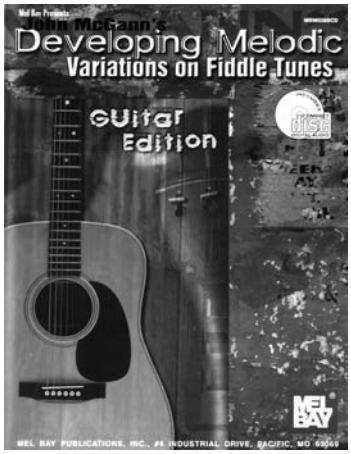
Another attractive element offered here is that four of the musicians in this band take turns singing the lead part. The feel is also one of each musician having brought a piece of his unique musical past in the song selection process. Thus the disc displays a musical variety that keeps your attention but it still maintains a traditional cohesiveness and thus the variety does not become distracting. It is a wonderful blend of musical taste, talent, and tradition.

If you are a fan of traditional bluegrass music and are looking for something new that will take you back to those roots, yet at the some time provide a fresh and new listening experience I highly recommend Perfect Strangers!

Song List: Sing Me A Song, Roll On John, Scofield Mine Disaster, Homeless Joe, The Hermit Miner, Bluegrass In The Backwoods, Twenty One Years, Canned By The Best, Evening Shade, The Greatest Midwestern Fear, If We Never Meet Again, Pineville Breakdown, For On The Water, Wandering Boy

Book Reviews

Developing Melodic Variations on Fiddle Tunes
by John McGann
Mel Bay Publications



Reviewed by Dan Miller

Learning how to improvise is one of those things that all intermediate level musicians struggle with. It can be a very illusive concept. Listening to someone else's arrangement and copying it, or learning it off of tablature is a concrete concept, but coming up with your own arrangements, especially in the context of live spontaneous in-the-moment improvisation is a scary and strange thing. Where is the piece of paper or CD that can tell you how to do that?

In his new book *Developing Melodic Variations on Fiddle Tunes*, Berkeley College of Music graduate John McGann doesn't hand you all the answers, but he does provide many examples which may allow you to unlock the mystery of improvisation with greater ease. The concept of the book is simple, yet incredibly useful. In the book, and on the accompanying CD, John provides five variations of eleven standard fiddle tunes. The first is a bare bones melodic presentation. The next four variations provide examples of how one might embellish the melody to provide interest. The layout of the book allows you to look at each four bar phrase in comparison with the others. For example, on the first page of each song you are presented with the first four measures of each of the five variations, one above the other. On the next page you get the next four measures of each of the five variations, etc. It is not a layout conducive to plowing through and learning five complete variations of these tunes. It is the layout of a study method. You can certainly learn all five variations of each tune, but the study of each measure and how John has altered them from the basic melody, and in comparison with each other, is what will provide real insight here.

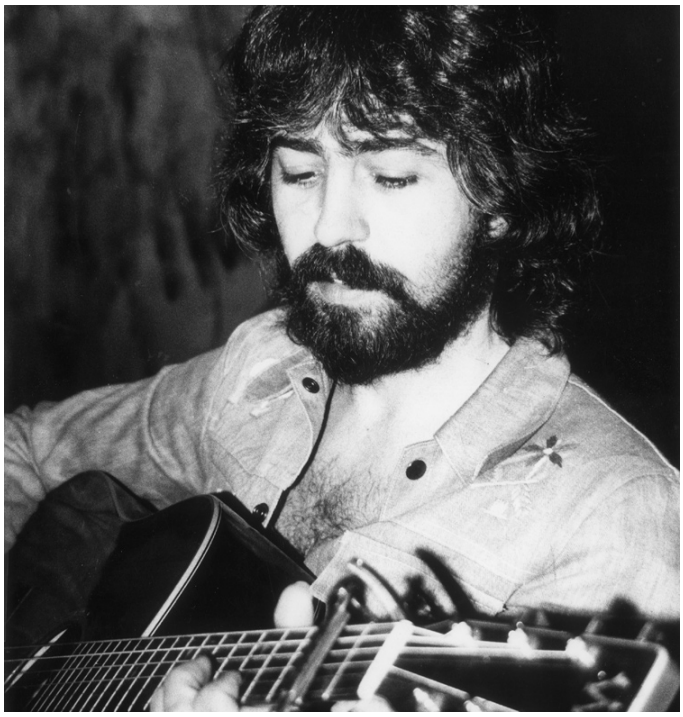
The thing I really like about the way John chose to arrange each of the variations is that he did so in a way that makes it easy to follow where he took each variation. In other words he did not randomly throw out five different solos. Each variation here has a connection back to the melody and remains predominantly in the first position on the guitar. Thus it becomes easy to understand how one might create variations and yet still maintain melodic integrity, still play within the realm of one's ability, and stay in the same position on the guitar. I think that many players are intimidated by the idea of improvisation because they believe that improvisation means advanced up-the-neck complicated solos. Here John demonstrates how one can add variety and interest to your playing without having to perform finger gymnastic or hot licks all over the fingerboard.

I think that this book is very accessible to the beginner as well as the intermediate player. Most beginners may tend to believe that improvisation is outside of their realm of ability, however, in this book John McGann has created a method of looking at variation and improvisation that is accessible and will open many doors for players at all levels. If you are interested in learning about improvisation I would say that this new book by John McGann is the first place you should turn. I think it is a wonderful addition to the flatpicking instructional library and something that is long overdue.

Song List: Flop Eared Mule, Old Joe Clark, Soldier's Joy, Whiskey Before Breakfast, Billy In The Lowground, Forked Deer, Blackberry Blossom, Salty Dog, Arkansas Traveller, Ragtime Annie, Fisher's Hornpipe, Fast Old Joe Clark, Fast Soldier's Joy.

A Tribute to Clarence White

by Guest Columnist Beppe Gambetta



Clarence White

Here is another contribution to celebrate the great music of Clarence White. This work is part of a little "campaign" I'm doing in several magazines and workshops to remind guitar enthusiasts that this year marks the thirtieth anniversary of Clarence White's death. Clarence White is one of the world's guitar masters and should be remembered and celebrated at guitar festivals and other events.

It was not easy to assemble an essential introduction to the style of Clarence White. He left us a great deal of material and a very complex style with many arrangements, main licks and phrases. It was for me a great joy to spend many hours giving close attention to his music again, to transcribe essential fragments of his playing. The result is a small collection of phrases of different structures and keys that can be used in the construction of a solo or in the back-up of a piece. When you pay close attention to Clarence's aesthetic and analyze his musical choices, his lessons can go deep, far beyond the simple repetition of his notes.

Clarence was for sure the flatpicker who innovated the crosspicking technique with a progressive creativity that went far beyond the usual way typical of that period. At that time crosspicking solos were generally played with repetitive and squared "down-down-up" arpeggios where the melody notes were generally played on the lowest of the three strings, starting on the first beat of the measure. Clarence used crosspicking in delicious short fill-in phrases (examples #1 and #2) or with melodic function (example #3). He could play the melodic notes in every place of the "triad" and he sometimes started the crosspicking in some unpredictable places of the measure, blending it also with other techniques.

Examples #4 and #5 are about the "double-stop" technique that Clarence mastered at the best with fine taste, perfect dynamics, always giving the right evidence to the melodic notes. Also, in this case, the choice is not a banal uninterrupted series of double notes in harmony, but the technique is artistically alternated and mixed with other configurations and effects.

It is also important to see how Clarence was able to give a new life to the licks based on the more traditional phrases like in examples #6 and #7 where few simple and unexpected notes give a new modern spirit to the phrases invented by the old masters.

The examples #8, #9, and #10 are the transcriptions of some of the most famous phrases invented by Clarence where the freedom of his musical spirit and his sense of having fun in playing with the notes are clearly evident. With Clarence's speed and clarity of execution all of these phrases reach an effect of great fun and virtuosity.

I suggest that readers have a concentrated listening session of his music before starting to learn it. I'm sure you will have a lot of fun!

Audio CD
Tracks 15-24

Clarence White Licks

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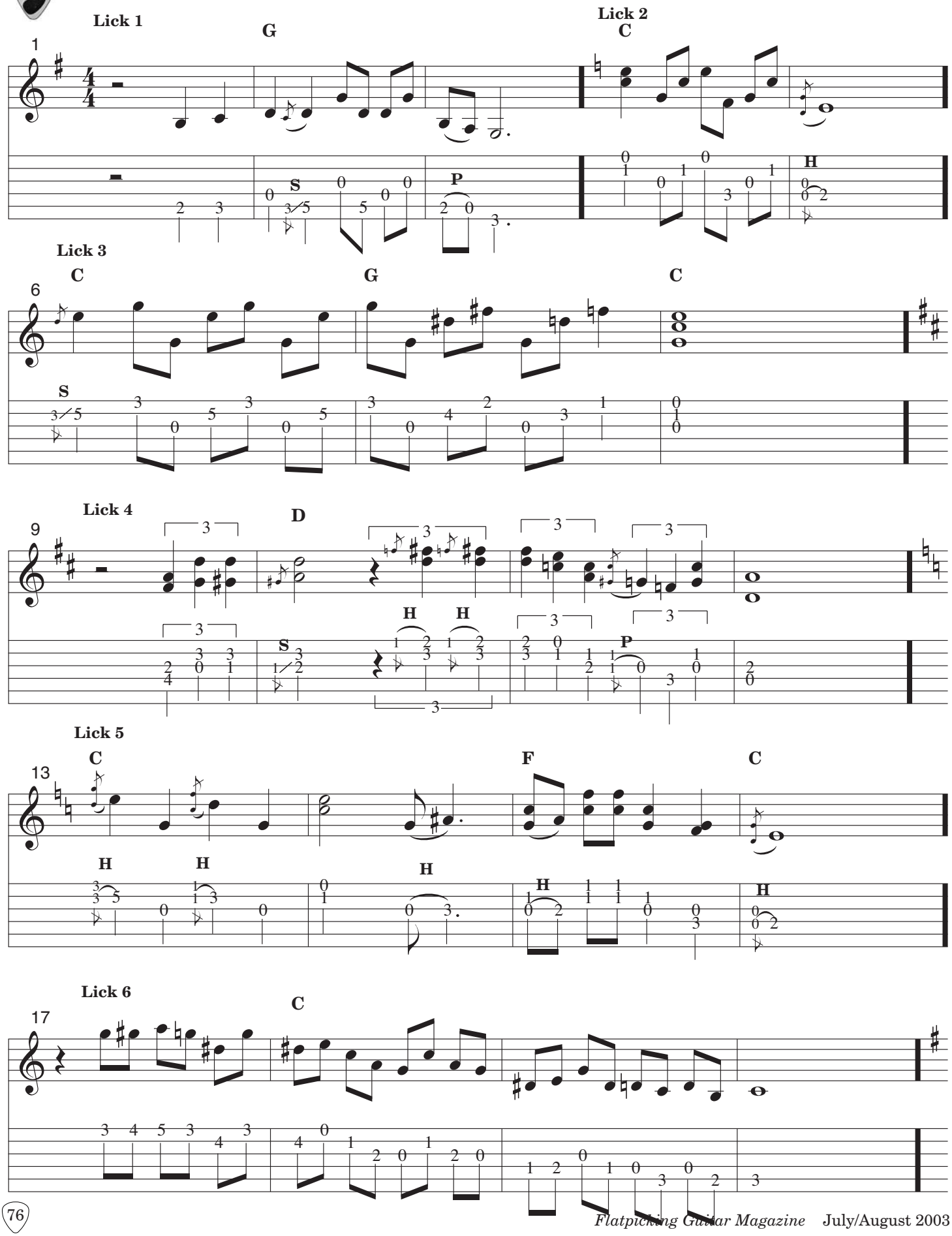
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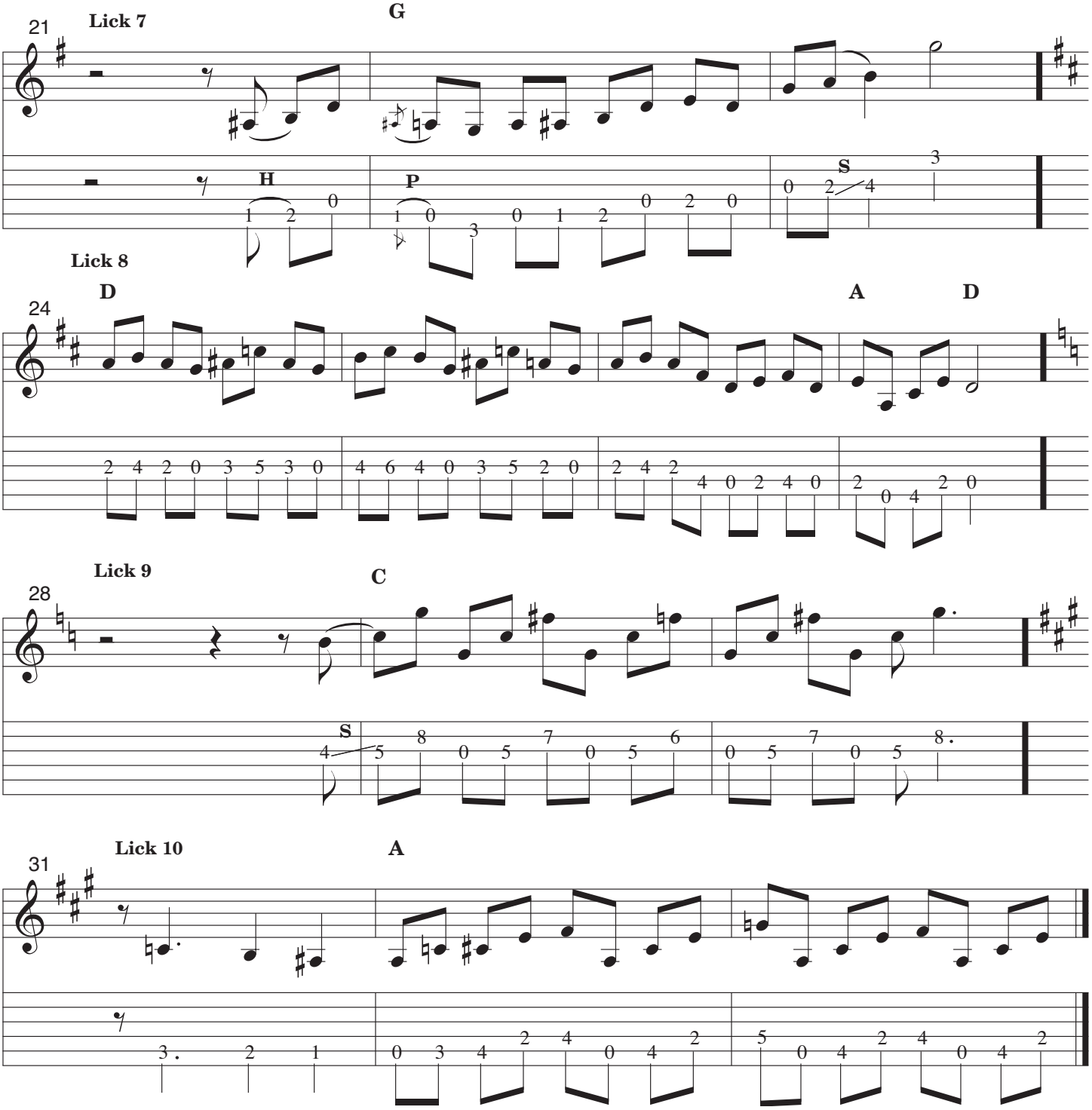
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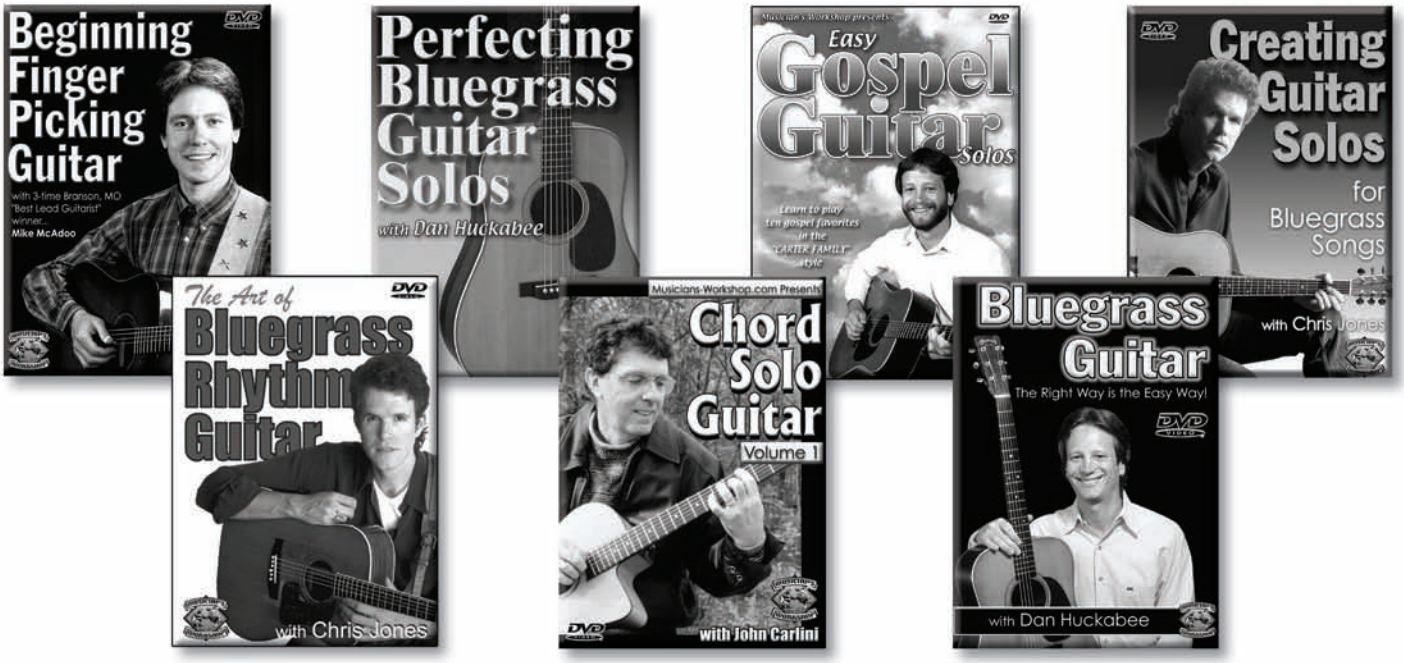
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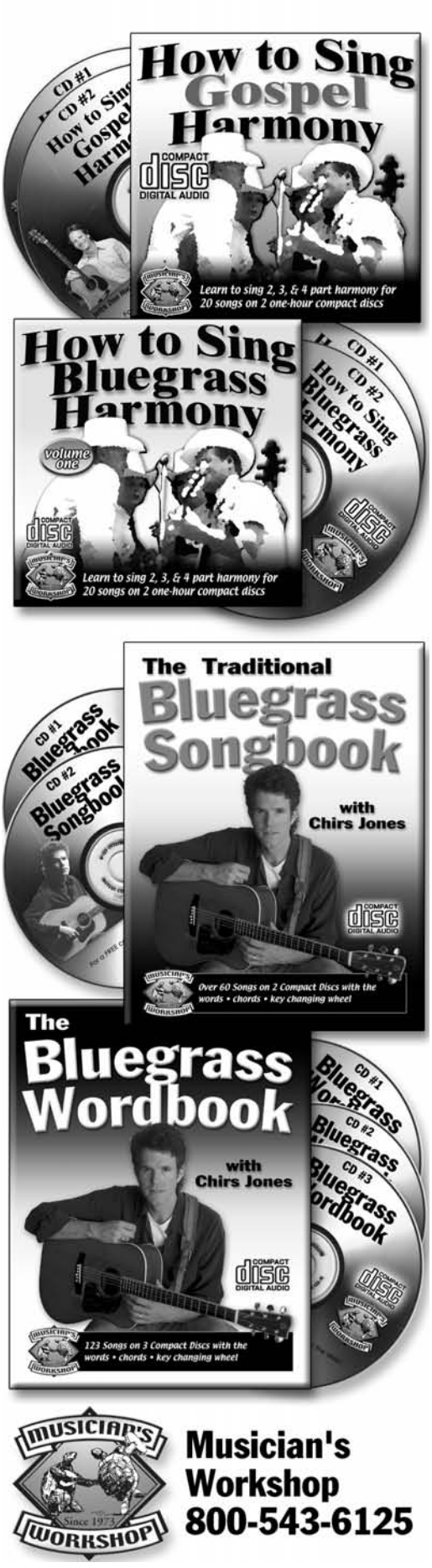
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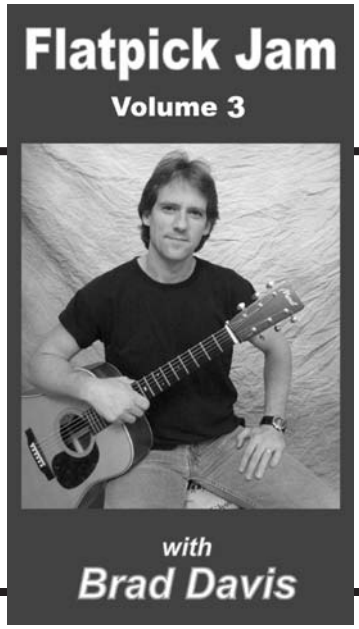

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